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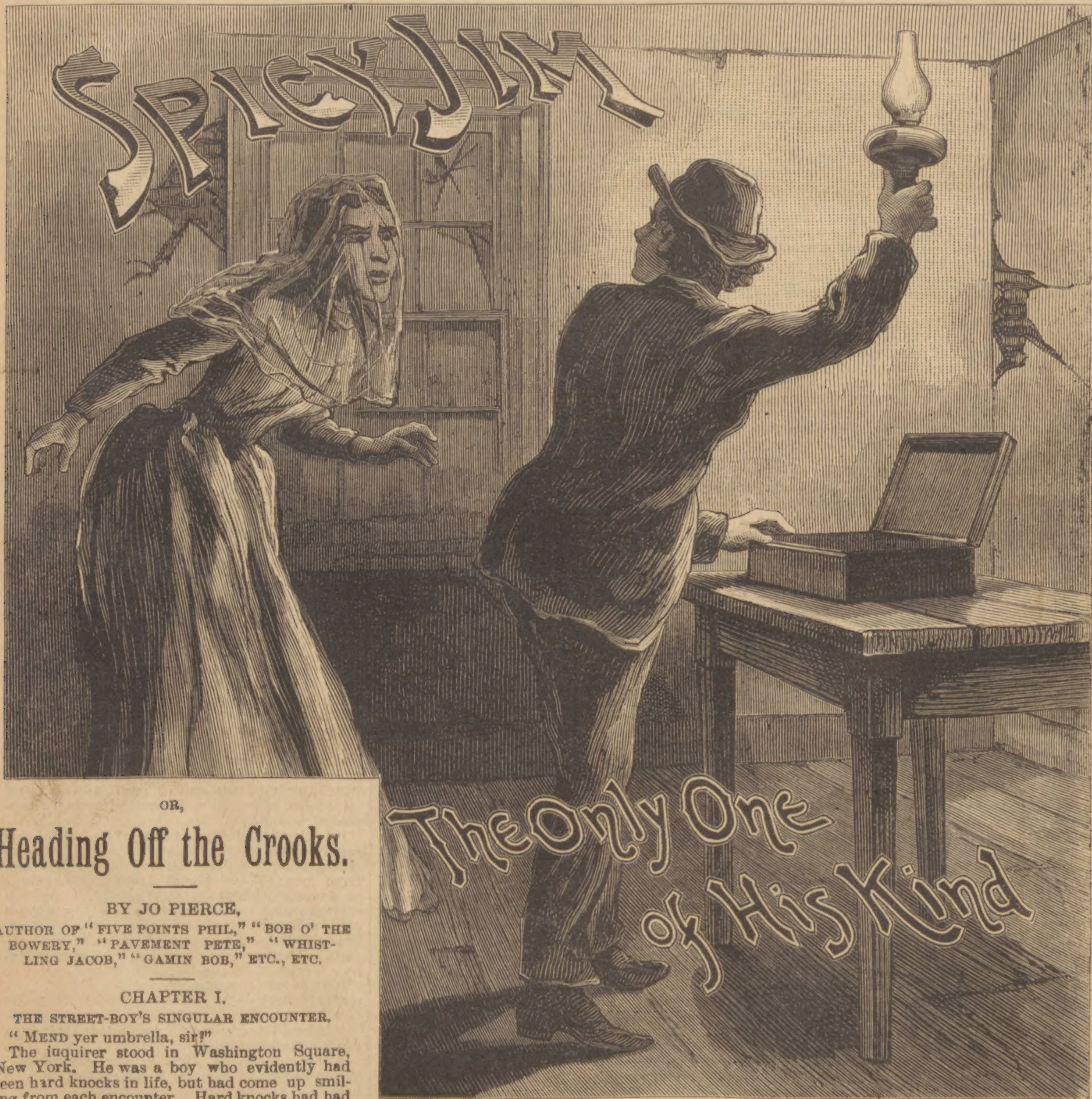
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OR, Heading Off the Crooks.

BY JO PIERCE,
AUTHOR OF "FIVE POINTS PHIL," "BOB O' THE
BOWERY," "PAVEMENT PETE," "WHIST-
LING JACOB," "GAMIN BOB," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE STREET-BOY'S SINGULAR ENCOUNTER.

"MEND yer umbrella, sir!"
The inquirer stood in Washington Square,
New York. He was a boy who evidently had
seen hard knocks in life, but had come up smil-
ing from each encounter. Hard knocks had had
more effect upon his apparel, and a breeze from
Macdougall street found divers rags to catch and

The Only One
of His Kind

JIM TURNED QUICKLY FROM INVESTIGATING THE MYSTERIOUS BOX TO BEHOLD—WAS
IT AN APPRAITHON?

flutter around the person of the young citizen of the metropolis.

Under his arm he carried three umbrellas which had seen their best days, and these, together with the inquiry he made, indicated his calling.

He had addressed a tall, slender man of about fifty years, and all things indicated a business opportunity—the latter carried an umbrella of most dilapidated appearance.

He started as the boy's clear business-like voice sounded at his elbow, and looked down wonderingly.

"Eh? What's that, my lad?"

"Mend yer umbrella, sir?"

"Bless me! why should you mend it?"

"So it'll shed rain."

"But no rain is falling."

"It'll rain some time, I reckon."

"True, true; I had forgotten that. Now you mention the matter, I believe I have one or two umbrellas at the house which might well be mended. The one I have with me, however, is nearly new."

The boy cast a bewildered glance at the umbrella. Wind, sun and rain had bleached it nearly white, and one brace was protruding in an open-faced way.

"I am going home, now," added the speaker. "If you will come with me you shall have the chance to repair the old ones."

"All right. Which way is it?"

"Which way? Bless me! I hardly know. What park is this?"

"Washington Square."

"Oh! yes; I remember it distinctly. Well, I live on Rivington street. Come with me."

"Hold on! You're going toward Mac-dougal."

The gentleman stopped short and laughed.

"Don't wonder at me, my lad. I was born and reared in this glorious city of New York, but am very absent-minded. I sometimes do queer things. My friends say so, and I think I shall have to admit it. But I have weighty matters on my mind. We are going toward the Bowery, now, are we not?"

"Sertain."

"Then we are all right— What did you say your name was?"

"I hadn't divulged the important fact, but I am Spicy Jim."

"Very well, Mr. Jim. My name is Professor Hannibal Jones. I am glad to meet you, sir!"

Mr. Jones paused in the middle of Mercer street and gravely shook hands with his companion.

Many persons might have fallen into the error of supposing that the gentleman was a mild kind of monomaniac, but Spicy Jim was too shrewd and observing to think this. Spicy Jim had his own peculiarities, and these traits enabled him to recognize and appreciate their counterpart in others. He realized that Mr. Jones was absent-minded and lacking in what was practical. This explained his oddities, not the least of which was the carrying of the old umbrella.

Spicy Jim was, in most things, Jones's opposite. Jim was practical, wide-awake, and on the alert for any business chance. He never lost his way in New York; he knew its streets as well as any person from the Barge Office to High Bridge.

He was fourteen years old, but might well have passed for sixteen. He was old in experience, too, for necessity had made his existence one devoted to business ever since he was big enough to work.

Down on Bond street lived Joshua Green, an umbrella-mender. Joshua had early taken Spicy Jim into his service. The latter had learned the trade well, and could adjust a brace, rib, or other accessory, to a mutilated umbrella in the best of style.

It was a humble life, but Spicy Jim was not a member of the Four Hundred, or a lost prince, or one too good to make the best of necessity.

He rather liked his calling, though he was boy enough to crave a life affording more excitement.

Professor Jones did not reside in an aristocratic locality—the most loyal of the dwellers in Rivington street would hardly claim that distinction for their street; and the most earnest search would fail to discover the footprints of one of the Four Hundred on the sidewalk. Yet, when Jones opened the door, Spicy Jim saw a hall which was a model of neatness, and the result of quite an outlay of money in the way of furnishing.

Before more could be said a young lady suddenly came out of the back-parlor, and greeted the professor brightly.

"So you're home again, Uncle Hannibal? We were beginning to wonder what had become of you."

"Yes, yes; no doubt. Where are the umbrellas?"

"The umbrellas?"

"Yes, Bertha."

The young lady glanced at the collection under Spicy Jim's arm and smiled slightly.

"Were you thinking of having repairs made?"

"Yes."

"Then you need not have come home."

"Eh? How so?"

"The only old umbrella belonging to us, of which I know, is the one you have with you."

The professor raised the dilapidated specimen which he carried. One brace still protruded through its almost-colorless side, and, on the whole, it was so badly demoralized as to be useless.

"Bless me!" he exclaimed, "I thought I had the new one. This is most singular. I have caused this estimable youth to come all the way here for nothing! He must be remunerated for his trouble."

"Is he an umbrella-mender?"

"Yes; I think so, at least."

"That's my line o' biz," declared Jim, in a breezy voice. "I'm employed in the great emporium o' Mr. Joshua Green, Esquire, where we jine broken ribs, dislorked braces, *et setter-atum*. All orders attended to promptly, an' charges as low as the lowest, ef not more so. Terms, cash. Old ribs an' braces returned ef desired."

The speaker warmed to his subject, and waved his old umbrellas in gestures fit for an orator.

"Bless me!" uttered Professor Jones.

"Kind treatment given the sick while their ribs is healin'," pursued Spicy Jim, gravely. "All modern improvements of a horse-pittal. Color restored ter faded ginghams, an' Central Park parasols."

"Indeed! And what, may I ask, do you mean by 'Central Park parasols'?"

"Giddy ones carried by girls w'en they want ter ketch a beau."

"You seem to be an observing young man."

"I knows the ways o' the world. I've lived on this globe ever since I was born, an' I noticed when I drawed my first breath that my lungs was like a blacksmith's bellows. I commented on it ter my grandad, at the time. He asked me ter holler, ter prove the power o' my lungs, an' I yelled so loud I skeered my nurse inter a 'sensible fit'."

The umbrella-mender made these surprising statements with the utmost gravity, and Bertha was impressed with the idea that she had met a very original character.

The professor, too, had been studying Jim attentively, though he now proved that it was not with an eye to the boy's peculiarities by abruptly asking:

"Are you strong?"

"Kin only be beat by an elephant," readily returned Spicy Jim.

"Do you make much money at your business?"

"We 'cumulate debts, mostly."

"Would you like to enter my service?"

"Table-girl, or cook?"

"Eh?"

"I say, do you want me ez a cook?"

"Nonsense! what an idea. No, I want you to—to—well, to help me and my assistant in scientific work."

"Goin' ter visit the moon?"

"Certainly not. Don't be so absurd, boy. Our work is in a particularly attractive field, and consists in finding and examining old ruins."

"I'm in that biz, already."

Spicy Jim held up the umbrellas and looked at them quizzically.

"Ef them ain't old ruins, where'll ye find any?" he added.

"Uncle," observed Bertha, "if you want a helper you had better take this young man. Clearly, he is an original, and I think he will take kindly to your work."

"Work an' me is quite intimate, though I can't say we are overly friendly. I try to be, but work has got a vicious cast o' temper, an' it's inclined ter raise high jinks with me. See them wounds on my hands? Them was made by work, with the jagged end of an umbrella rib. That ain't true friendship!"

Bertha smiled upon the speaker. Spicy Jim's manner was as quaint as his expressions, and she duly appreciated them.

Professor Jones, however, looked bewildered.

"I hardly follow you," he admitted, "but you look to be a stout, honest lad, and that is

what I want. I also desire a strong man. Do you know of one?"

"Josh Green is afflicted that way."

"What way?"

"With strength."

Jones shook his head gravely.

"I fear my mind is not of proper caliber to follow the levity of the youth of to-day, but I dare say it is all right. Pray enter my museum, and I will elucidate matters more fully."

"Navigate on," Spicy Jim graciously directed.

The professor led the way to the second floor. The space originally divided into two rooms was then all in one, and its contents made the Bond street gamin stop short in wonder. He had never seen anything like it.

Jones had well termed it a museum, and it contained a little of every thing; things that he had collected during his scientific career.

Spicy Jim did not at first see the minor articles; all that he could take in at first was a human skeleton which stood facing the door, and the sight, so out of the ordinary line of his practical life, rather startled him.

He stared at it like one fascinated.

"You notice my giant," observed the professor, with a gratified look.

"Notice it? Wal, I should remark that I do!" the boy admitted.

"Do you know what it is?"

"It's emaciated enough fur a dude, but altogether too wide across the shoulders."

"I dug it up from a mound."

"From a which?"

"A mound. It dates back of Columbus."

"Was it his father?"

"No, no; I mean that it was, in life, a person who lived in this vicinity, before Columbus discovered America."

"Was he a friend o' yours?"

"I have, indeed, a very friendly feeling for it," replied the simple-minded professor, "but I am not yet able to place his line of descent. No true disciple of scientific investigation now believes that Columbus was the first European in this country. Many combat the idea that others came before him, and the world is not ripe for the full, glorious truth, but I am not a doubter. It is certain, I assert, that, in the year 986, Bjorne Herjufson was driven in sight of our coast by a storm, and that more or less active explorations followed."

"Was he your relation?"

"Who?"

"B'jinks Herjumpson."

"Nonsense! He was an ancient navigator. He paved the way, as I have said. Then, in the year 1001, Leif Erickson, the Icelandic navigator, discovered Labrador, and sailed along the coast as far south as Rhode Island. Six years later, Thorfinn Karlsefne explored the coast of Massachusetts, and settlements were, I claim, made all along the coast, and continued until 1350, when the great plague which depopulated Iceland and Greenland caused communication to be cut off with the New World. See?"

"Oh! cert!"

Spicy Jim answered glibly, but with a polite fiction. He was not so well informed on the days of Columbus as he would have been if he had gone to school instead of mending umbrellas, while as for the northern navigators, he had never heard of them.

Herjulfson, Erickson, Karlsefne, Freydis and Madoc were names which, to the best of his knowledge, had never been made famous in Bond street.

Professor Jones had become a very different kind of a man. He had warmed to his subject, which, plainly, was one of great interest, and all of his absent-minded peculiarity had disappeared.

"Look around you!" he went on. "In this room you see the skeletons of three persons—the remains of pre-historic man. I have taken them from mounds—old burial-places that date back of known periods in this country. On the shelves which run around the room you will see other relics of the unknown age—pottery, arrow-heads, battle-axes, stone vessels, and other objects too numerous to mention. All were taken by me from the mounds."

"Cheerful occupation!"

"It is glorious!"

"Pay ye well!"

"Money I do not seek. As a scientist, it pays me wonderfully well?"

"Jes' so!" Spicy Jim grimly commented.

"You've got a reg'lar upheaved graveyard here!"

"Now, you know my profession. If I engage you it will be to go along on my trips and aid in

the work. The strong man I want as a wielder of spade and pick. Your own work would be lighter. What do you say?—will you enter my service?"

CHAPTER II.

UNPLEASANT VISITORS INTRUDE.

SPICY JIM was wise in worldly wisdom, and as keenly attentive to business aims and chances as any banker on Wall street. He was not fascinated by the description of Professor Jones's occupation, or the chance to become connected with it, but he was not slow to decide that his answer would depend upon what Jones would pay him.

He made his position known, and the bargain was made inside of three minutes.

Jones offered no glittering inducements, but did promise, without circumlocution, to pay a sum greater than could be made in the umbrella business. Spicy Jim promised his own services, and declared that he was sure Joshua Green, too, would be glad to join the party.

The professor insisted upon showing some of his treasures, but his apprentice could not imbibe his own enthusiasm. Only the skeletons affected Jim, and he did not care whether the owners had died five years, or five hundred years before.

"A skelington is a skelington, fix it as yer will," he gravely asserted, "an' they send a creepy sensation up my backbone. Ef the defunct persons feel as cut up over the affair as I do, I pity them fur bein' tied up with wire like that. Should s'pose their ghosts would haunt ye, by gum!"

Mr. Jones was too much absorbed in business thoughts to heed this plain speaking.

"I will accompany you to your home," he remarked, "and see Green while there is a chance. Before going I have an errand outside which will occupy me half an hour or more. Will you wait in the parlor with Bertha until I return?"

"Shall be delighted. Spicy Jim ain't got any aversion to female sassiety."

"We will go down, then."

They went, and the professor's plan was carried out. The umbrella-mender liked the change from the museum and its trophies. The parlor was bright and pleasant—and so was Bertha. The more he looked at her, the more he gave way to admiration. She was plump, rosy-cheeked, bright-eyed and sparkling. James estimated her to be seventeen years old, and wished he was of suitable age to admire her on a more substantial basis.

"So you think of going to work for Uncle Hannibal?" she questioned, pleasantly.

"Yes."

"Do you think you will like the occupation?"

"Dunno. I've never robbed a grave, yet."

"My dear boy, don't begin by taking that view of it. Uncle has been in the business ever since before I was born, and has hardly ever found human remains. Quaint things in stone and clay form are his principal prizes."

"I seen 'em."

"His work is considered more than honorable; he is doing grandly for science."

"Ever see ghosts?"

"Never!"

"Should think this house would be full o' them. Ef my skelington ever gits strung up on wires, I'll haunt them as do it, by gum!"

Bertha abandoned the attempt to convince the boy, but referred briefly to similar trophies of scientific search, as seen in museums of various cities, and explained that it was the general opinion that another race besides the Indians had existed in the country before Columbus ever saw our shores, and that Mr. Jones and many other learned men were anxious to establish the fact and learn more of them.

They were still talking when the bell rung, and, in a few moments, the servant appeared at the parlor door.

"Miss Bertha," she announced, "there is a—a lady and a gentleman here that want to see you."

Her manner was uncertain, but Bertha at once replied:

"Show them in!"

The servant stepped back, and the visitors appeared. First came a tall, over-dressed woman who carried an abundance of paint and powder on her face. Spicy Jim took a dislike to her at the start, and thought her a poor companion for pretty Bertha.

The man was a stout fellow of middle age who looked very much like a prize-fighter, his smooth-shaven face being particularly grim, brutal and coarse.

Spicy Jim instinctively glanced at Bertha, and was surprised to see the effect the intruders had upon her. She rose quickly and regarded them with unmistakable evidence of alarm, the color changing in her face, and her eyes growing large and startled.

The painted woman gave her blonde head another ungraceful jerk, as substitute for a nod.

"Hullo, Miss Pert!" she exclaimed. "How is your Highness, to-day?"

Bertha made no answer, and the pugilistic-looking man commented in a hoarse voice:

"Didn't know she was deaf an' dumb."

The woman waved her hand toward a chair.

"Sit down, Tom Bates! Manners is manners, if guests have to set the example."

"Correct, Mrs. Parsons!"

The unprepossessing pair sat down with all the coolness in the world, but Bertha remained standing. The so-called Mrs. Parsons regarded her maliciously.

"Have you turned to stone, miss?"

"You, here!" faltered Bertha.

"Of all idiotic questions! Where else can we be? Don't you see we are here?"

"Yes."

"Did you say you were pleased?"

"No," Bertha admitted, faintly.

Mrs. Parsons laughed in a high key, and Tom Bates, taking his cue, laughed in a very deep key. Spicy Jim looked on in wonder, unable to understand the scene, and the audacity of the intruders.

"What a little fool she is!" commented Mrs. Parsons.

Bertha suddenly gained a measure of courage.

"Why have you come here?"

"To see you."

"I don't want to see you!"

"That's undutiful."

"I owe you no duty!"

"No?"

"Not a particle."

"Perhaps you will explain why not?"

"Simply because I don't believe anything that you ever told me."

"Mrs. Hannibal Jones was not so skeptical."

"You deceived her, but you cannot deceive me."

Mrs. Parsons's evil-looking eyes glittered.

"Do you mean that you propose to defy me?"

"I mean that I don't believe you."

"Do you know that I proved all this to your aunt, years ago?"

"She thought you did."

"Stop this waste o' time!" put in Tom Bates, hoarsely. "You've got ter put on the screws."

"I will put them on—I will prove to this insignificant creature that I am what I assert. Girl, I can read your rebellious, impudent nature, and will make no appeal to your filial nature. No; I will at once assert my rights, and demand of you what you are not inclined to yield willingly—obedience. Remember, I am your mother!"

Spicy Jim's mouth flew open. He stared at Mrs. Parsons for a moment blankly, and then exclaimed:

"Yowlin' wild-cats!"

The painted lady turned upon him sharply.

"What rag-bag is this?" she demanded.

"A rag-bag free from paint an' powder, mum," serenely replied the apprentice.

"What's that?"

"Murray Hill English language, 'cordin' ter the label on it."

"Don't you dare to insult me."

"Jes' so, by gum!"

Mrs. Parsons turned to Bertha with fresh anger.

"Who is this hoodlum?"

"What do you care who he is?"

"I am not going to be insulted by him."

"Then I advise you not to set the example, as you did a moment ago."

"If he opens his mouth again, out of this house he goes!"

"Do you own the house?"

"I do!"

"This talk is foolish—"

The painted woman removed a package of papers from the bosom of her dress, and, flourishing it, interrupted in a manner even more intemperate than before:

"I'll show you if it is foolish, before I am done here. I say, I own this house, and I will prove it. Your gang sailed fast and high when I was dead broke, a few years ago, but times have changed a good bit. I came well heeled, this time, and don't you forget it. It is in my power to turn you into the street, my flippant miss!"

"Your claim is too absurd to answer. If you have nothing more important to say I would be

glad to have you go. Have you any business here?"

"Have—I—any—business!"

Mrs. Parsons repeated the words with a slow and ominous pause after each, and then Tom Bates laughed in his husky way.

"The gal don't know how funny she is!" he declared.

"I'll show her; I'll show the young tiger-cat!" cried the painted woman, venomously.

"Look-a-here!" uttered Spicy Jim, "do you want a perleceman called, Bertha? Ef so, jest lisp the news an' this chick is off. Yowlin' wild-cats, yes! We'll jug this pair, an' give 'em a country residence up at Sing Sing, by gum. Only whisper the order, an' I'll race fur a copper like mad. Spicy Jim knows snakes w'en he sees 'em, an' he sees 'em now. Why, cert!"

The visitors were looking daggers at the boy, but, at that moment, the door opened and Professor Jones appeared.

CHAPTER III.

WHO WAS THE THIEF?

THE professor's change of expression showed that he was surprised to find callers present, but, absent-minded as he usually was, he never forgot to be a gentleman.

He now bowed to Mrs. Parsons, and looked at Bertha inquiringly.

"Here is the old duffer!" quoth Mrs. Parsons.

An expression of such complete vulgarity from a woman's lips was enough to startle even Professor Jones, and he again gazed at the speaker.

"Looks like a broomstick with whiskers," remarked Tom Bates, huskily.

"Bless me!" Jones muttered.

"Uncle Hannibal," interrupted Bertha, "do you know this—this woman?"

"Lady!" corrected Mrs. Parsons, severely.

"When you deserve the complimentary name you shall receive it," returned the girl, with spirit. "Uncle, this is Mrs. Parsons. You remember her, don't you?"

It was needless to ask the question. The moment that Mr. Jones heard the name he recoiled, and his expression betrayed consternation.

"We are here, old chap!" the painted woman declared.

"Come ter see our relations," growled Mr. Thomas Bates, facetiously.

"Better look in the pig-pen!" observed Spicy Jim, frankly, but without attracting attention.

"I—I did not know where you were," stammered the professor.

"It don't matter where we were! It is where we are that concerns us all," answered Mrs. Parsons. "We have come to stop with you, Hannibal."

"You promised to keep away!" suddenly cried Jones, with more vehemence than any one would have thought him capable of showing.

"I come merely because you are in my house."

"Your house?"

"Yes."

"You are absurd."

"For once I don't blame you for saying a foolish thing; it is natural. I am a kind-hearted woman, and don't wish to play on your feelings. Hence, I will come to the point at once. When Amos Case died your wife inherited this house as heir-at-law. It was supposed that old Case left no will, for none was found at that time. A will has been found since. The house is not yours."

"Do you expect me to believe this?"

"Yes."

"I do not believe it."

"You doubt my word?"

"Yes."

"I expected you would. Luckily, we do not need to rely upon any person's say-so; the will is in existence to speak for itself, and it will speak. I presume you know Amos Case's handwriting?"

"Yes."

"Read this, and study the signature!"

She flaunted a legal-looking document before him, and Tom Bates croaked:

"An' mind, cully, dat you don't try ter tear the will up. I'll be watchin' you. That's why I'm here. See?"

"Who is this man?" Jones asked, indignantly, addressing Mrs. Parsons, but motioning to Bates.

"My protector."

"Dat's straight," Tom agreed.

"Did you think you were coming among outlaws, that you should take such a—a person along to 'protect' you—if that is the word you prefer?"

"I didn't intend to lose the will," the painted woman nonchalantly answered.

The professor swallowed his anger as far as possible. There were times when, in his abstraction, he would utterly fail to perceive sneers and insults which were leveled at him, but he was sensitive, naturally, and, being now all devoted to practical matters, he ignored the enmity between himself and Mrs. Parsons long enough to feel hurt and indignant that a rough should be brought there to stand guard over him.

Dropping the subject, he read the document slowly and carefully.

Spicy Jim, who had become very much interested, inferred that Mr. Jones found little consolation in the paper.

When it was read he again faced the female visitor.

"I find no bequest to you here," he observed.

"There is none."

"Then why do you make any claim?"

"Did you observe how Case disposed of this house?"

"He gave it to Bertha."

"Well?"

"What claim have you to it?"

"Bertha is a minor, and I am her mother. Such being the case, her property is under my control until she is legally her own mistress."

"You signed a paper relinquishing all claim to her."

"Perhaps you can produce that paper?"

"I can."

The professor went quickly to the back parlor and unlocked a desk that stood there. It had belonged to his deceased wife, and had not been opened, as far as he knew, in many months. During the last years of her life she had made almost exclusive use of the room, and it had been touched but rarely since her death.

There was but little in the desk now, and half a dozen papers in pigeon-holes made the sum total of all it contained in that line.

One after another he examined these papers, but, when he looked at the last, a peculiar expression passed over his face. It was of no value, but he gazed at it fixedly, his manner betraying emotion, not because of what he saw, but of what he did not see.

He went over the whole collection a second time, but without any change of expression. Then he called Bertha into the room.

"Have you removed that paper?" he asked.

"If No; I never have opened the desk since aunt died."

"This is very strange. It is gone!"

"How can that be? Only you and I ever enter here."

"That makes it all the stranger. Anyhow, the paper is gone. I don't know whether it would be strictly good in law, but it certainly would go a good way toward influencing matters in our favor. Now, it's gone. It is most singular and incomprehensible."

"Uncle, don't you see?" Bertha cried.

"What?"

"Didn't you notice that woman's triumphant manner and expression when she observed that perhaps you could produce the paper?"

"I did notice something of the kind."

"She knew that it was gone. She, or some tool of hers, was the robber; I don't know just who. Possibly they bribed the servant we recently discharged; perhaps that brutal-looking wretch in the next room acted as house-breaker."

"In any case, the paper is gone and—"

The professor paused. In this dilemma he did not see his way clear to fight Mrs. Parsons.

That painted person had grown impatient, and she suddenly appeared at the connecting door.

"Well, are you ready?" she demanded.

Mr. Jones regarded her with intentness not to be expected of one who was so often devoid of the rudiments of practical strength.

"Woman," he returned, "what have you done with that paper?"

"If Faith, old gent, I know of no such paper, at all. You are the one who was prating about it—who was going to produce it. Well, go ahead and do it!"

"I believe you have taken it."

"How could I?"

"You ought to know better than I."

"If I had taken it, I should know. I did not take it; I had nothing to do with its disappearance, if it is gone. So you have lost it?"

Jones did not answer. He was now sorry that he had admitted as much—there was a faint possibility that she was not the thief, or back of the thief—and saw how helpless he was in the struggle.

The painted woman gave her blonde head a

triumphant swing which might appropriately be termed a swagger.

"Let's come down to business," she advised. "Bar the release, anyhow; if it were at hand it would be valueless. Let's sit down again."

Jones mechanically followed her to the other room.

"Perhaps you had better give orders to have a suite of rooms made ready for me," Mrs. Parsons added.

"Eh?"

"This being my house, I wish to move in at once, in order to be near my daughter."

"We can't accommodate you!" declared Bertha, with spirit.

"Would you refuse your mother?"

"I don't believe you are my mother."

"Jones will not deny it."

The professor did not deny it.

"Either I move in," Mrs. Parsons added, "or you move out. I have been deprived of my rights long enough. By the terms of the will this house is yours, girl, but I am given full charge of the property until you are twenty-one. The law gives me full charge of you, too. I do not wish to seem severe, but I demand filial obedience from you. Our august professor will not order me out of the house, for he knows full well what that would mean. You and he have enjoyed luxury for years, while I have been barred out, but all you have goes in a lump. If you defy me I shall deprive Jones of home and money; if I do that, he becomes a beggar!"

The unfortunate professor sat silent and miserable before this array of facts.

It meant more to him than it would have done to an ordinary man.

His scientific pursuit was the passion of his life. If the threatened blow fell he would have no place for his collection, and poverty would compel him to abandon his life-work and try to earn a living in a prosaic way.

And he knew very well that he was not fit to do that.

It was a pause very painful to him and Bertha, and their expressions told the fact clearly, but Mrs. Parsons was complacent, cool and triumphant.

CHAPTER IV.

FOLLOWING HUMAN GAME.

SPICY JIM found it very hard to remain silent while this conversation was taking place. He had conceived a strong dislike for Mrs. Parsons and Tom Bates, and the natural result was that he became in lively sympathy with Jones and Bertha.

The professor's odd ways were all forgotten for the time.

The umbrella-mender naturally thought according to the way of the people among whom he had been brought up. Their way was of an emphatic nature, and the professor's apprentice was confident that, if it were his case, he should eject the intruders summarily.

He read them better than his friends, simply because he was wiser in worldly lore. He knew that neither Mrs. Parsons nor Bates could gain foothold in respectable society. The one was a genuine rough; the other was an adventuress.

Just what crimes could be charged to them was not clear, but it did not seem libelous to suspect them of the whole catalogue.

It was some time before Mr. Jones found his tongue. When he did it was not to meet the painted woman boldly. He denied nothing she had claimed, but, shorn of the strength he had shown recently, he pleaded for a little time.

Their coming and the demand, he urged, had been very sudden, and he was not prepared to take action in the case then. He asked for delay; for an opportunity to think the matter over and look to the proofs.

"Ain't all been proved once?" Mrs. Parsons demanded.

"My late wife talked with you, then."

"Was her judgment no good?"

"She was versed in law."

"Are you?"

"In a measure."

"You look it!"

"So does a mummy!"

The first sarcastic retort came from Mrs. Parsons; the second, from Tom Bates. The professor bore both meekly.

"You must confess that the matter is too important to take action at once," he continued, wearily.

"I'll admit that I expected this, prof., and I am going to humor you. There is no reason why I should, except that I am accommodating."

Tom Bates chuckled hoarsely.

"I'll give you time—I won't say how much. It won't be long. I am going to watch you, and shall drop on you right away if I see signs I don't like. Look out that you don't try to play me for an innocent; I am a daddy high-roller when I put the skates on."

The last unique claim was very indefinite, but Jones did not ask to have it explained. He already knew enough about her.

The interview was over; Mrs. Parsons only remained to repeat her warnings. Her manner continued offensive, and she flaunted her gaudy skirts as no womanly woman would have done.

"Bad all through!" muttered the umbrella-mender.

When they were gone the professor was surprised to see his apprentice hasten to his side and ask the question:

"Be yer goin' ter see Joshua Green, now?"

"Give me time, young man. I'll call in a couple of hours, for the business is pressing, but I do not feel like it just now. Don't hurry me!"

He spoke wearily, and in a down-hearted way, as if pre-historic man had suddenly lost interest for him, but the boy's answer was quick and eager:

"All right! I'm off, now. Josh Green will be in whenever yer call, an' I dassay I shall, too, but Spicy Jim has got other fish ter ketch now. Yowlin' wild-cats, yes! I'm off!"

James opened the door and beat a retreat so unceremonious that, at any other time, it would have created wonder, but he did not go without method.

He wanted to see more of the late visitors.

"I'll find where they live, or wear my uppers all off!" was his comment, as he hastened down the steps.

Mrs. Parsons and Bates were going away, but not together. The painted woman led, carrying herself with a free-and-easy, independent carriage, while Tom rolled along a few yards in the rear, puffing a very bad cigar which he had lighted.

The full measure of their offense against good looks and manners was brought about by the broad daylight, and Spicy Jim shook his head gravely.

"Sing Sing has got better!" he commented sagely.

When the pair reached the Bowery they turned north and walked on until they came to Great Jones street. There they turned to the left, and soon brought up at a house, the door of which Mrs. Parsons opened with a key. She entered there; Bates, by the basement door.

"Yowlin' wildcats!" the pursued observed. "I'll be chased by ghosts ef that house ain't plum' opposite ter J. Green's classic abode. Now, then, there may be a chance fur me ter pipe 'em off from my own room. Spicy Jim, you're in luck. Scatter!"

He went around into Bond street, climbed two flights of stairs and entered a back-room. A gray-haired, very muscular-looking man sat there mending an umbrella.

"Here you be!" he exclaimed.

"Here I be, Josh."

"Only two umbrells?"

"Only two."

James went to the window and began to scan the house which had suddenly become of interest to him. Nothing was to be seen, but he was patient.

"Trade is poor," said Joshua Green, deliberately jabbing a broken rib through the cover to an umbrella.

Spicy Jim saw a woman appear at a window across the way and raise the shade. It was Mrs. Parsons. She began to remove the gaudy bonnet that covered her blonde hair.

"This life is a great change from war days," pursued Joshua, sulkily. "I never seen an umbrell, then, from Bull Run ter Malvern Hill, an' it rained all the time. Fact! Never seen no rain like Virginny rain. Once, the down-pour was so powerful that it washed the shirt off my back. Funny part on't was, it left my coat an' weskit on."

Jim saw a man appear by Mrs. Parsons's side. He was young, and looked handsome and gentlemanly. They began to talk earnestly.

"When I's in Californy, in '49," pursued Mr. Green, "thar was no rain fer three years. The ground got so hot in the sun that 'taters, apples, cowcubers, an' beans grew all cooked, an' wheat-fields was jest crowded with loaves o' bread which bung on the stubble. Powerful hot country, Californy is. An umbrell-mender would 'a' starved there durin' the dry spell I mention."

Mrs. Parsons took from her pocket a folded paper which Spicy Jim easily recognized as the will of Amos Case.

Her companion examined it closely. "A power behind the throne!" thought James. "Wonder who the young feller is, an' how he's inter it?"

"In 1833," went on Joshua, fitting a brace deftly, "it rained three hundred and sixty-seven straight days in New York. Umbrella-menders hired the biggest stores in the city, an' did a rushin' biz."

"Josh, who lives across the way?" James asked.

"Furnished rooms."

"Who runs it?"

"Dunno."

"Ever see them parties afore?"

"Don't see 'em now."

"Josh Green, you get a move on ye an' come here. I've hired you out fer the season. Your duties are ter dig up men of ancient vintage, but I allow that modern women enter inter our contrack. Spread them bow legs o' yourn an' come here!"

There was a good deal of good will between the umbrella-menders, and Josh did not resent this familiar mode of address. Instead, he good-humoredly obeyed.

"She looks like a measly, homely canary bird, or a bleached sunflower," Green commented, regarding Mrs. Parsons attentively. "Think I seen her at the window this A. M. Don't know her."

"An, the man?"

"Hullo!"

"You do know him."

"Bet yer socks! That's Temple Lloyd."

"Who is he?"

"Keeps a china store over nigh my sister's house, an' lives over it. Cert—I know him."

"What's his caliber?"

"Forty-one. He's a good fellow."

"What! an' a friend o' that monymont o' paint, powder, bleached hair an' peacock colors?"

"Does look queer, don't it?"

"You are mistaken on him."

"Not much. Don't know the fellow, myself, an' he don't know me—J. Green, umbrells artistically repaired an' braced in the j'int; terms, cash—but you can't fool me on Temple Lloyd. He's a peachblow vase with diamond fillin', over in his section. He's doin' a right smart business, an' gittin' rich fer a young man. Everybody dotes on him; he gives piles o' money ter city sassocieties fer benevolent purposes, an' they do say he sent three missionaries on his own expense ter Afrikay, fer the heathen ter eat."

"You've got the wrong man."

"Not much."

"An' he's hob-nobbin' with Yaller Hair?"

"Looks like it."

"It ain't possible."

"You'll notice, Spicy Jim, that they ain't lovin' or friendly. It follers that they are talkin' biz—yes; an' they are in dead earnest."

The last fact impressed the boy strongly. Whatever the bond between the pair might be, they had matters to talk about which they regarded as important.

The conversation lasted for half an hour longer, and then the young man rose, as if to take his leave.

"So-long, J. Green!" Spicy Jim exclaimed; and then without pausing to answer the question the umbrella-mender sent after him, he hurried out of the room and the house.

Straight to the corner of Great Jones street he went.

He was not long kept waiting, for the young man came out and turned toward the Bowery with quick steps. James made himself as inconspicuous as possible, and waited to see where his game would go.

A Fourth avenue car was approaching, and the unknown made for it at once.

"I'm in fer the war!" quoth Spicy Jim, and, with this observation, he leaped upon the front platform at the same time that the man swung himself on at the rear.

The car rolled northward, but the journey was not of long duration. As soon as Union Square was reached Jim's quarry alighted, and the latter followed suit as soon as he thought prudent.

Lloyd—to call the stranger by the name Joshua Green had given him—walked briskly into the park, but had not gone far when he turned toward a bench and joined a young lady who was sitting there.

"'Nother woman in the case?" commented James. "I s'pose it's natural, fer J. Green says as how they is at the bottom of all mischief, but where does this one come inter Yaller Hair's game! Some myst'ry here that ain't oblivious to the casual gaze, b'gum!"

He studied the manner of the pair on the bench.

They were looking into each other's face, and their general demeanor was of a kind which Jim analyzed with characteristic shrewdness.

"Lovers, b'gum! I must git a look at—"

The young lady turned her head further, and Jim stood amazed.

He was gazing at Bertha!

CHAPTER V.

THE MYSTERY OF TEMPLE LLOYD.

It was a complete surprise.

Spicy Jim had not expected to see any one he knew, so he had made no effort to recognize the young lady, and he could scarcely credit the testimony of his own eyes.

"Bertha—there? And in apparently affectionate conversation with a man who had just come from Mrs. Parsons?"

"Bertha it is," he reluctantly admitted, "but I'll be cook fer a Chinnee ef I undersan' the case. See her an' Mr. Temple Lloyd—if it's him, really—smile on ter each other! Yowlin' wild-cats! I'd give my Revolutionary War pension ter git sech smiles as he's gittin'. They're better than a dozen umbrellas ter mend!"

There did, indeed, seem to be a wonderful amount of good feeling between Lloyd and Bertha. It was not of the pronounced type by which some lovers make themselves objects of derision in public, but, in a quiet way, they gave evidence enough to satisfy Spicy Jim.

"Ef he's as rich as J. Green says, I guess the loss of the Rivington street house won't break Bertha all up. Ef there ain't a scheme on the griddle fer him ter furnish another house fer her, then you kin set me down fer a blind man. Shall I go up an' speak ter her?"

It took the boy only a very few seconds to decide upon this point.

"Not much, I won't; I don't know what ground is under my feet, an' I'm not goin' ter fall all over myself. Somebody is playin' Judas. Bertha an' Mrs. Parsons are either enemies, or they pretend ter be. Lloyd is friends with both, or pretends ter be. Somebody is bein' fooled. Wonder ef I kin find out who?"

There was a fascination about the idea of exposing a nefarious plot, and James forgot all else in an earnest desire to do it in this case.

He determined to make an effort to overhear the conversation of the couple on the bench, but how was he to do it?

If he went in front of them, Bertha would see and recognize him; if he tried to move up in the rear, the Park policeman was sure to fall upon him for getting on the grass.

While he hesitated Bertha and Lloyd rose and came toward him. He pretended to be absorbed in surveying a tree close at hand, and kept his back toward them.

They soon advanced near enough to make their conversation audible to him.

"I hope you will not let this worry you," remarked the man.

"I'll try not to worry, Temple," she returned.

"Remember that I am with you."

"I do, and it is a great consolation."

"You will find me a great general."

"You ought to be, after all your successful business enterprises."

"Let us be modest as to that, but not in regard to the cause we are now engaged in. Trust me and you and your friend shall be winners; the enemy must fail."

"How am I to meet Uncle Hannibal naturally?"

"Surely, you have not begun a career of deceit only to falter now?" returned Lloyd, smiling slightly.

"I'll try not to betray myself."

"That's right. Once let Mr. Jones suspect our plot and he would head us off."

"And Mrs. Parsons?"

Lloyd laughed unconcernedly.

"Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof. Now, here comes your car, my dear; take it and return home before you are missed. It's getting late, too."

He signalled to the car; he and Bertha parted with a warm hand-clasp, and she was soon on her way down the street. Lloyd watched for a moment, and then began his own journey on foot.

Thanks to their preoccupation, Spicy Jim had escaped notice. He had heard some of their conversation, too, but it was very indefinite. Lloyd had spoken of their "deceit" and their "plot," but against whom they were leveled was not clear.

There was a chance that every one was against Professor Jones, but James preferred not to

think so. He did not like to abandon his admiration of Bertha.

Temple Lloyd did not look behind him as he went, so he remained unconscious of one fact—he was being followed.

Spicy Jim was humoring a desire to get more points concerning the merchant.

The day was fast nearing an end. The homeward rush of the army of daily workers was falling off, and most of them had reached their residences and were engaged in wrestling with food more or less palatable. But in New York the going down of the sun does not mark the end of the city day, however it may be with the solar day. The average New Yorker does not fairly begin to *live*, as he regards the term and its application, until the moon, gas and electric lights don the sun's discarded crown.

If James had been under any doubts they would soon have been removed. His quarry went straight to a large store over the door of which was the name, "Temple Lloyd," in large letters.

The pursuer saw him enter what seemed to be a private office. Jim waited. Nearly all of the employees had departed. Others soon followed. Then Lloyd came out, leaving the porter alone.

Jim saw that the young man's face was earnest and thoughtful.

"He starts off as ef he had vallerble biz on hand. It may be about chiny plates and butter dishes, but I'll pursoc him a little longer. Spicy Jim, patent leather ain't so dear that you need ter hesitate about wearin' off yer uppers. Git a move on ye!"

He fell in behind Mr. Temple Lloyd and followed with quiet alertness, but the chase was but short. Lloyd entered a dingy room where, according to the sign over the door, billiards was the absorbing amusement.

James followed, and was interested at once. Mr. Temple Lloyd was shaking hands with three men who, evidently, had been seated together at a table before his entrance.

"The plot thickens!" muttered Jim.

The conclusion was natural. One of the men was Tom Bates; the others were very much like him in appearance. Between them and Lloyd some understanding seemed to exist. He was bland and gracious; they were hearty and familiar.

The party sat down, and Spicy Jim took position at an adjacent table, keeping his back to Bates, and burying his face in a comic paper.

"We will come to business, at once," Lloyd declared, as he distributed a handful of cigars.

"Go on, boss," Bates encouraged.

"Gentlemen, I take it you all possess nerve?"

There was an eager affirmative chorus.

"And can hold your tongues?"

Again the chorus.

"Then you are what I want. You came well recommended when Mr. Bates vouches for you; he is a gentleman of judgment."

"You do me proud, boss!" declared Tom.

"Now, as to to-night. I suppose all of you are ready for action?"

"We be, that."

"Then all will be simple. I have a close carriage engaged which will take you to the scene of action. I shall be there when you arrive. You have only to ride up, and then work under my directions."

"That's the stuff," Bates affirmed.

"No ghosts around there, is there, boss?" one of the other men asked.

"Not a ghost."

"I've heard a man was killed there."

"His ghost don't walk."

"I've knowed them as did. Slumpy Tim, the night watchman on a sart'in pier, used ter see a ghost—"

"I've heard of men seeing snakes, too. The house we are to visit is old, but you need have no fear of trouble from ghosts, or creatures of the flesh. No one ever goes there unless it is a stray tramp. Such a person we can pick out."

"Who's the woman in this case?"

"An estimable lady," Lloyd affirmed.

"Bates has been actin' as her dog."

This was said with a grin, and Tom waxed indignant.

"Sally Parsons is a hummer," he asserted, "an' you chaps would give yer ears ter be in her good graces. But she knows a gent better when she sees one, an' it's me she has took up wid. See?"

"Tom is all right," Lloyd asserted. "Now, then, man, you are to go to the corner of Third avenue and Fourteenth street at nine o'clock. You will see the carriage waiting there. You don't want to make any mistake, so you will ask the driver what his name is. If he says Pete Connor, he's your man. Get into the vehicle,

keep sober, ride where he drives, and you will have rocks in your pockets when the sun winks at the towers of the East River Bridge to-morrow morning."

Lloyd arose and tossed a coin down on the table.

"Drink to our success, but go light. Whisky steals a man's brains."

The merchant went out followed by the good wishes of his allies. Spicy Jim lingered with the hope that Bates and the others would indulge in gossip, but they did nothing of the kind. On the contrary, they soon left the saloon, their matter-of-fact manner showing that they had exhausted comments already.

The boy watcher also went his way.

"Spicy Jim, you're in luck!" he commented. "You ain't got nary an idee what is up, but you're goin' ter know, by gum! You are goin' on this trip, too, ef it kin be arranged. Yowlin' wildcats, yes!"

He walked rapidly for several minutes, and then entered a stable.

An honest-looking man was sweeping the floor.

"Hullo, Petey!"

"Ah! me boy, an' is it you it is? Begorra, it's been a long toime since I set me two peepers on ye. How goes it wid yez?"

"Tolerable, Petey. My ribs is all hunk, an' so is my braces. My kiver may be bleached a bit, but the stuff is still there. I'm genuine silk, with gold plates an' trimmin's. Five dollars apiece—discount ter the trade. Say, Petey, what's up?"

"What about?"

"Your job, ter-night."

"How'd ye hear ave that?"

"Never mind. Where ye goin'?"

"Up north ave de Harlem, somewheres; don't know just where. Oi'm ter get de full dirack-shuns later. Why?"

"Who ye goin' ter take?"

"Three men Oi'm ter mate at de corner ave de avenoo an' Fourteen' strate. Wan Timple engaged me. Why?"

"Petey, I want ter go along."

"All right."

"But I must go hid."

"Why?"

"The fellers will object."

"Spicy, phat's up?"

Mr. Connor ceased work and leaned upon his broom as he asked the question. Previously, he had not had reason to suppose that the expedition was out of the ordinary run though he had been cautioned not to mention it.

He had disobeyed to the extent of confiding in Spicy Jim, but he did this because he and Jim were good friends. And, from the same reason, the boy did not hesitate to talk freely in return.

CHAPTER VI.

THE NIGHT DIGGERS AND THE BOX.

"HERE's the carriage!"

"Make sure of it."

"Cert, I will. I'm no slouch!"

It was the appointed hour, and Tom Bates and his friends had found a closed carriage waiting at the corner of Third avenue and Fourteenth street. He now walked up to the driver.

"What's yer name, me man?"

"Peter Connor, begorra!"

"All right; we're yer cargo."

"Tumble in."

This preliminary was satisfactory to all parties, and Tom and his friends entered the carriage under the impression that they had taken every necessary precaution. Once inside they began to smoke, and gave no further heed to affairs around them.

Unknown to the trio, at the time they entered the vehicle at one side a boy had agilely mounted to the box at the other side. When Connor sat down he spread out a rubber cape over his shoulders, the cloudy state of the sky making some excuse for the step, and those inside did not suspect that a slender youth was nestling close up to their Jehu.

The carriage rolled northward.

It was no short journey to the Harlem River, but Connor had a fine team, and the ground was covered in good time. After crossing the stream Spicy Jim knew but very little about the way they took, for the annexed district was out of his line of business, but Connor did not hesitate. He drove rapidly, and the street grew to look less and less like a part of the great American city.

Anon they turned into a side street, and, five minutes later, paused in front of a house.

The building, which was extremely ancient of appearance, was unlighted. It bore no signs of

life, and, as it stood in the middle of a wide lot, with no other house near, had an extremely lonesome, unpleasant aspect.

Spicy Jim did not wait for any ceremony, but leaped off and stood behind the horses while Bates and his friends alighted.

They went toward the house, but Connor re-ascended to the box. His orders were not to linger near the old house, but to be on hand at a specified hour.

"Oi hate ter l'ave yez, Jimmy," he declared.

"I'm all right."

"Don't yez git ketched. Oi make me no doubt thim fellers hev mischief in their hearts, an' they w'd niver stop ter think twice ef dey ketched yez spyin' on 'em. Luk out, Jimmy!"

"My amiable frien', you mean all right, but yer don't know Spicy Jim. You'll find his ribs an' braces sound as steel when the smoke o' battle clears away. So long, Petey; I'll see ye when the sun goes down. Remember me ter any good-lookin' damsel yer see!"

Waving his hand the boy skipped quietly from the cover of the horses to that of the fence. Following the latter on two sides of the square it inclosed, he approached the house by the rear. Abundant shrubbery gave him ample concealment.

As he had expected, he found four men on the scene—Temple Lloyd had met his allies.

"Now to work!" he exclaimed, just as James got within hearing.

"The owner won't ketch us at it?"

"I happen to know that the owner is even now within a few yards of the Bowery."

"Guess you're right," coincided Bates. "Old Jones ain't the sort ter go out nights."

"Hush! No names here!"

Lloyd spoke with an appearance of vexation, but the damage was done already. Spicy Jim, quick to arrive at conclusions, decided that Professor Hannibal Jones was the person referred to as the owner of the estate. Jim did not allow this belief to be interfered with by the fact that Jones was such a common name.

After this caution Lloyd directed the men to follow him, and led the way to a point near the north-east corner of the lot. There he drew spades out of the shrubbery and tersely directed:

"Dig there!"

The point indicated was where a rose-bush put forth an abundance of pure white blossoms, each one showing clearly in the semi-darkness. The men began at once.

"I s'pose this is all right," muttered the professor's apprentice, from his hiding-place near at hand, "but I don't ketch on. They ain't grave-robbers, as far as I kin see, an' ef Spicy Jim has been lured all the way up here ter see a rosebush dug up, he will go off an' commit some desprit deed. He will, by gum!"

The boy was a good deal perplexed.

He had felt sure that something of great importance was at hand, but the rose-bush had staggered his faith.

It did not take the laborers long to dig under the bush and tear it up. When it was cast aside they continued at work, and an excavation was rapidly made.

Jim's wavering faith returned as he saw Temple Lloyd go close to the laborers and watch with unfeigned interest.

Suddenly one of the spades gave forth a peculiar sound.

"Carefully!" cried Lloyd. "There is a tin box there, and it must not be injured. Give me a spade!"

He leaped into the excavation, and began to work.

"Cap'n Kidd's gold!" quoth one of the men, aside.

"I've heard it said that ghosts guard buried gold," answered his companion.

"Only when a murder has been done."

"A man was killed in yender house."

"I'll bet his ghost is nigh!"

The two looked around nervously, but no ghost appeared on the scene.

"Yowlin' wildcats!" muttered James, "this is growin' excitin'. I kin feel my hair sizzle an' dance on my head. My ribs an' braces is sprung, by gum!"

Temple Lloyd was not beset with any superstitious fears. He used the spade with care, and soon uncovered a small tin box. His companions began to be excited, but when he stooped and easily lifted the box with one hand their expectations fell.

Anything of such light weight could not be a depository for gold coin.

"So far, good!" Lloyd commented. "You will remain here, men, all of you. I am going to the house to examine this box, but will return

shortly. When I come there will be more work for you to do—I hope!"

He walked away without waiting for an answer.

His allies remained, but he did not go alone. The discovery of the box had aroused Spicy Jim's keenest interest, and he was resolved to see it opened, if possible.

The wild mass of shrubbery was all in his favor, and he followed without danger until the house was reached. Lloyd opened the door and entered. Jim waited a moment to see if he could hear key turned or bolt drawn. No such sound came, and he boldly followed after the leader.

The latter was ascending the stairs. The darkness was intense, but the pursuer did not hesitate to keep on. With all the caution possible he continued the chase.

Once on the next floor he had to be less precipitate. He heard a door closed, and ventured to light a match. It was not hard to locate the room where Lloyd was, but the closed door presented a barrier.

The spirit of decay had full swing all around, and the door of the adjoining room was off its hinges and leaning against the wall. Jim had just time to see this, and then his match went out. It brought a new discovery, however—a ray of light in the second room proved that Lloyd had made use of a lamp in the first.

The spy entered the former.

There was a connecting door, and a broken panel gave the boy just the chance he desired. He hastened to secure a view, and the broken panel gave him the chance, while the crevices were not wide enough to expose him to discovery.

He saw Lloyd at once.

The merchant stood by a table upon which were the lamp and the box, and he was prying the lid from the latter.

Spicy Jim watched with breathless attention. The work was soon done; the cover flew back.

James could not see the interior, but Lloyd's face became a panorama. The merchant had been all eagerness, but the light suddenly died out of his eyes, his face became downcast, and he stared blankly at the interior of the box.

"His name is Dennis K. Mud!" commented Spicy Jim, in a whisper.

There was a pause, during which Lloyd's manner told of keen disappointment, and then he muttered words which the watcher could not understand, but which did not seem expressive of joy. He lifted the box and examined it narrowly, as if hoping to find a secret cavity, but it was of the plainest nature.

He finally set it down with more force than was in keeping with good temper.

This done he meditated, disappointment still expressed in his face, and walked up and down the room several times.

"His High-jinks is laid out," Jim decided, "an' he's tryin' ter see his way clear under the new dispensation. Ef he would call me in, an' pay erbout a saw-buck fer a retainin' fee, I might mebbe help him out. As 'tis, he must steer his own toboggan; it costs cash ter git first-class primers on delikit p'int's."

Lloyd did not seem to gain any inspiration, but after pacing the room for awhile, went out with slow steps and lowered head.

Spicy Jim stood still until he heard the outer door close, and then boldly invaded the other room. Intentionally, or otherwise, Lloyd had left the light burning, and the irrepressible boy was bound to have a look at the box.

He made a discovery at the very first.

Upon the cover was painted a name, and he read it without trouble:

"AMOS CASE!"

"Whew!" murmured the lad, "that's the same man whose will Mrs. Parsons talked about so much at Jones's!"

A footstep sounded near. Jim turned quickly from investigating the mysterious box to behold—was it an apparition?

CHAPTER VII.

THE WOMAN IN WHITE.

"By gum!"

The words fell from the umbrella-mender's lips in a serio-comic way. He had turned with a feeling not devoid of alarm, for he expected to see Temple Lloyd back again, but the reality was very different from the expectation.

A human being was there, but it was a woman—more than that, a woman appareled in most spectral style. From head to foot she was clad in white. Even her face was covered with a veil of that hue. She was tall and slender, but that was all that could be discovered.

She returned the boy's regard, and each satisfied an inquisitive inclination to a certain de-

gree before the silence was broken. She evinced no disposition to speak, but her companion did, at last.

"Great snakes!" Spicy Jim exclaimed, "be you a livin' ghost, or a dead one?"

She shook her head sadly.

"Unfortunately, I still live."

"Then there's hope fer you ter reform."

"Reform?"

"Yes; ter quit goin' 'round in spook's bleached-out raiment, an' skeerin' folks out o' their nine senses."

"I am in sackcloth and ashes."

"I see the sackcloth, but where's the ashes?"

"I speak figuratively."

"Don't do it, mum! Figgers I don't know nothin' erbout. Maf'matics an' me ain't on good terms. 'Rithmetic, awlgerbray, deuteronomy, an' sich, I never studied. I kin tell how much it costs ter hev a rib or brace put in; or a new cover spread on a skelington of a bashed-up umbrell; but thar my pussonal familiarity with figgers ends. Don't speak that way, mum!"

"You do not understand, but let it pass. What are you doing here?"

"Hevin' a wild flirtation with you, mum."

"How did you enter the house?"

"By the chimney."

"Impossible!"

"All things is possible with muskeeters an' me—"

"You talk nonsense!"

The veiled woman turned impatiently, and then her attention fell upon the box. She regarded it curiously.

"What is this?" she asked.

"It's an egg-rejuvenater. No matter ef an egg is old, wrinkled, bald-beaded, toothless, an' worse-smellin' than a New York street, it can be made young in that box!"

This remarkable statement was gravely made, but the veiled woman suddenly saw the lettering on the box.

"What have we here?"

"A man's name."

"And the name is— Merciful heavens! it is the name of the man who was murdered in this room!"

Spicy Jim leaped back like an acrobat and looked around in a startled way. He was startled, at length. Matter-of-fact as he was, the deserted, decaying old house, the veiled woman, the various mysteries and the personal danger he knew he was in, combined, had had effect upon him, and her almost hysterical announcement upset him entirely.

He expected to see a real ghost, but they had the scene to themselves.

The woman wrung her hands nervously, and almost sobbingly murmured:

"His box!—his box!"

"An' where is he?" James asked.

"Ask those who murdered him?"

"They did it here?"

"Yes; in this very room!"

The boy moved uneasily.

"Hadrn't we better go out?" he asked. "The air is p'izon damp, here, an' roomatiz is yaukin' at my nigh hind leg, already."

"There is fresh earth on this box. Where did you get it, boy?"

"It was somebody else."

"Who is he? Where is he? Show me the man! Some one has dug up this box. Let me see him at once. Do you hear me?"—at once!"

Her manner had become imperious, and she took a step toward the boy. Her veil was not thick enough to hide the glow of eyes which seemed most unnaturally bright, just then.

James, however, had become as calm as ever.

"Le's hev an understandin'. Who be you, an' what do yer want ter do?"

"Never mind! Show me the man!"

"Go slow! I ain't goin' ter rush inter this job until I know jest how I stand. Ef I did know I might be ready ter help ye, mebbe. Until I do know, I'll bet ye a century bank-note I won't meddle. Jest say who ye be, mum, will yer?"

"I will not!"

"All right, Fourth-o'-July."

"Do you refuse to show me?"

"Yes."

"How dare you?"

"Mostly because I dassent consent."

"What does it matter?" she cried, suddenly.

"The freshness of the earth shows that the box has just been dug up. If you were not the digger, he is in the garden, now. I will go there at once!"

She turned away quickly. Spicy Jim called after her, but she gave no heed. She hastened out of the room, and down the stairs.

"Yowlin' wild cats! there is fun ahead!"

James commented. "I want ter see it, an' I'll jest hang on ter the tail o' the kite. I may git a ride ter the moon."

He followed with speed equal to her own. Once outside the house he could see her plainly, her white dress making her a conspicuous object. She was hastening along through the grounds, and he knew that, unless the men had deserted the place, she would soon find them.

As chance would have it, he discovered them first, for she passed on one side without noticing them. He paused.

"No better place ter see the circus than here. She will be back, and then the band will play an' the sun will stand still. Earthquakes won't be no comparison!"

He took refuge in the bushes.

Temple Lloyd and his associates had begun work at a new point, and the wielders of the spades were laboring in earnest. Jim rather hoped that the woman in white would let them alone, for he was curious to know what they expected to unearth next.

He was not allowed to know.

After a short pause he saw the woman again approaching. She was not long in discovering the men, and she came on with quick steps, but so lightly that she was only a few yards distant when one of the diggers, as he raised himself to cast aside a spadeful of earth, chanced to see her.

The effect was startling.

The spade fell from his nerveless hand; he stared for a moment in mute terror; and then a yell broke from his lips. Springing out of the excavation he started to run.

Naturally, his associates were not long in making the same discovery, and all but Lloyd yielded to terror equal to the first discoverer's.

Lloyd had more intelligence, and, ordinarily, would not have yielded to belief in things supernatural, but example goes a long way. He saw his men in swift and terrified retreat, and he turned his face the same way and did not allow them to increase the lead.

"Go it, January!" shouted Spicy Jim, in hilarious glee. "Maud S. won't never shine her shoes on the turf ag'in, ef she hears o' the time you made!"

Nobody heard these words, but there was good reason for such obliviousness. The woman in white was as much interested as the men, if not so badly frightened. She paused by the excavation and watched until the fugitives disappeared. What was in her mind Jim could not tell, but he was curious to see what she would do next.

At the point where she stood there was an elevated ridge in the grounds. The excavation had been made therein.

She descended and looked at the result of their work, but there was nothing to be seen but the barren soil. If they had expected great results, and used judgment in their expectations, the fulfillment lay below.

Spicy Jim looked first at her and then toward the street, and repeated the action several times.

It had occurred to him that the late diggers might be so badly alarmed that they would take the carriage and hasten back to the city.

"Then where would Spicy Jim be?" he soliloquized. "I'm no pedestrian, and no swine. Reckon I'll shake my fair white lily an' hustle after the four-legged hoss-line run by P. Connor, gent!"

A few moments later the boy was beside the fence which bordered the road. Then he saw Lloyd returning with resolute steps—the other men had disappeared.

The merchant was both ashamed and angry. The way in which he had fled had been too cowardly for a practical man to endure tamely, and he was resolved to learn the meaning of the late excitement. Back he went, followed at a distance by Jim, but the woman in white had disappeared.

Lloyd searched both the grounds and the house to find her, but all in vain. He saw her no more.

When he abandoned the attempt he tried to find Tom Bates and the other helpers, but they, too, were conspicuous by their absence. He could discover no one, though, unknown to him, he was all the while watched by Jim.

It was very plain that Mr. Temple Lloyd was an angry man, but he had to make the best of it. He covered the excavation over with boards and earth, concealed the tin box, and, at the appointed hour, met Connor in front of the house.

Then, too, Bates and the helpers came stealing back, half in fear, half in shame. Lloyd sternly ordered them to enter the carriage. They did

so, and Connor drove them away. Then Lloyd went to get his own conveyance.

By using good judgment Spicy Jim went back to New York as he had come away from it, and without being discovered. That night he slept soundly. When he joined Joshua Green the next morning, the latter remarked:

"We go ter-day ter help Professor Jones dig up tombs, or the like of that, in the yard of an old house north o' the city."

"Where?" cried Jim, in sudden excitement.

"Don't know. We'll see when we git thar."

CHAPTER VIII.

FURTHER EXCAVATIONS.

"HERE we are, gentlemen!"

The sun was nearing the zenith when Professor Jones made this announcement. He had conducted his apprentices, Spicy Jim and Joshua Green, along the same northern road Jim had gone before, but not in a way quite so easy.

They had an Express-wagon which was drawn by a horse which, never remarkable for beauty, perhaps, had become old, bony, thin in flesh and devoid of ambition. Mr. Jones drove, and he made a rare driver. He held the reins gingerly and awkwardly, and excited much amusement by the way. Now and then a misguided boy shouted disrespectfully to him, but it is doubtful if the professor heard a word.

He had relapsed into his old, absent-minded mood, and all troubles were forgotten in his all-consuming zeal to secure new trophies in the cause of science.

Ever since Joshua Green's announcement Spicy Jim had been eager to learn their destination, and, when Mr. Jones made the announcement above recorded, the boy was not surprised to see before him the very house in and around which the scenes of the previous night had occurred.

He gazed at it eagerly, but it gave no evidence of the strange events Jim had seen.

Thus far he had said nothing to Jones about these adventures. The professor had been to Bond street, the previous evening, and, as has been indicated, made all necessary arrangements with Joshua, whereby the latter and Jim became apprentices in the cause of science.

The only chance for a plain statement had been during the recent ride, and Jones's abstraction was not the only impediment to revelation—Jim was very uncertain as to the standing of Temple Lloyd.

Lloyd and Bertha were on very intimate terms; their manner was that of genuine lovers. Were both sincere, or was he deceiving the girl? Were both true to Jones, or was one a traitor? Or were both traitors?

There was double dealing somewhere. Bertha and Mrs. Parsons were enemies. Lloyd seemed to be on very good terms with both. Which one was he deceiving?

It was a complete muddle, and, when the boy would have divulged all that he knew, some power seemed to hold back the words.

They drove into the yard, and Joshua began to unload the spades, picks, and other implements they had brought. "Jim improved the chance to address Mr. Jones."

"That house ain't new, boss."

"It is very old."

"Anybody live there?"

"No."

"Been deserted long?"

"Many years."

"Tain't haunted, is it?"

"There are rats there."

"I mean, by real ghosts?"

"Bless me! there is no such thing," the professor returned, coming out of his abstraction a little. "Ghosts exist only in the minds of people who are horribly ignorant. You are young, and your views are just forming. Don't let any one make you believe in humbug of that kind."

"Ef there was ghosts, or ghostesses, the house looks fit fer them. It exercises a pecoiliar infloence onter me. I feel a funny sensation along my backbone, as ef somebody was currying me down with a nutmeg-grater. Ever feel that way, Prof?"

Jim regarded the learned scientist with great gravity, and the latter responded:

"Bless me, no! That is very odd, indeed; I never heard of anything of the kind. It comes outside of my professional field, but I will mention it to my friend, Professor Clemens Schudenmeister, who deals with just such phenomena."

"Do so," advised the impenitent apprentice, solemnly. "There must be a reason fer it. Never was a murder done in the house, was there?"

"Yes."

"You don't say so!"

"It is only too true."

"Who got the worst on't?"

"A certain Amos Case."

"Why was it done? Who done it?"

"Perhaps I will tell you, later, but Mr. Green has everything ready for work, and we will begin at once. Follow me!"

Jones took a spade, and his apprentices secured the other implements and followed him.

Spicy Jim noticed as a peculiar fact that the leader took the same path that Lloyd and his allies had traveled the night before, and it was not long before the elevation, or ridge, appeared to view. There was, however, no sign of Lloyd's excavation; the earth had been replaced, and the turf so carefully put in shape again that no casual glance would detect that it had been molested. This surprised Jim, for, having gone back to New York with the subordinates, he knew they had not helped refill the pit.

The professor paused within twenty feet of it.

"Do you see this high point of land?" he asked.

"We do, that," Joshua answered.

"It is a mound, and was made from five hundred to eight hundred years ago."

"Did you help make it?" Spicy Jim gravely asked.

"It was the work of the pre-historic met of America—of that I am convinced. As yet, no part of the mound has been opened, but that is merely because the attention of archaeologists has never been drawn to it. 'Tis for us to discover the glorious truth."

"Ef truth has been buried eight hundred years, it's high time ter dig it up," commented Spicy Jim.

The professor did not heed him.

"While there is a chance that I may be in error," he continued, warming to his subject, "I feel sure of my position. Nature or modern man did not make that mound. Far back in the days regarding which no historian's pen ever wrote definitely, and, now, never can write, the mound was made. By whom? The followers of Herjulfson, of Erickson, of Karlsefne, of Freydis, or of Madoc? I don't know; I may never know. Many persons stoutly disbelieve that European navigators were in America before Columbus, but I sincerely believe that the Norwegian, Welsh and Icelandic explorers were all that is claimed for them; I believe that the pre-historic man of our country came over in a ship commanded by one of those bold spirits, settled here, lived, made our mounds, and died!"

All this had been said with enthusiasm. Jones was full of his subject. He had removed his hat, and stood with uncovered head, as if in homage to the people he revered.

What he said was all Greek to his companions, and Joshua spoke in a low voice to James:

"Reminds me o' the time I was sojerin' in Verginny in '64. It rained continual fer eleven months, an' the army hadn't an umbrella ter its name; but the wetness caused the mightiest toad-stools ter spring up that you ever seen. They was four foot in diameter across the tops, an' when we finally marched on Richmond, every sojer carried a toad-stool umbrella over his head!"

Joshua spoke with a trace of resentment. He felt that the professor was getting ahead of him in personal recollections, and was determined to keep his end up.

Mr. Jones meditated for some time, and then aroused.

"Dig here!" he directed, pointing.

Joshua and James went to work.

"Do ye own this place?" Jim asked.

"Yes," Jones answered.

"How long since?"

"I purchased it but recently. It was once the property of Amos Case. He was not a man who cared for the fine things of life, and he let the grounds go to waste as they saw fit. Since his death no one has lived here. I never knew of the mound until, when passing here lately, I wandered in from a motive of curiosity. I saw how promising the case was, and bought the whole lot."

"What d'ye expect ter find here?"

"It is idle to speculate, but I hope to benefit science."

"Be you sure the mound is old?"

"What modern man should make it?"

"Had Amos Case relatives?"

"Bertha was one."

"Anybody else?"

"No near relative. But this talk is idle; let us think only of our work."

The professor spoke with some irritation. He was wholly absorbed in the excavation, and watched the progress made by the diggers

anxiously. Joshua proved to be a ready and rapid, but phlegmatic worker. He chewed tobacco and muttered about heavy rains seen, or alleged to have been seen, during his campaigning days, and was wholly indifferent as to pre-historic man.

Closely as Mr. Jones watched the work he failed to see anything of interest for a long time. If they had been toiling in a garden of ordinary nature just as many discoveries would have rewarded them.

The earth was firm, showing that it had not been disturbed for a long time, but neither pottery, arrow-heads nor pre-historic man appeared at their call.

Several times Spicy Jim was on the point of telling all that he knew about Temple Lloyd, Mrs. Parsons, the Woman in White (as he had definitely named her) and the events of the previous night, but, as often, he checked himself.

"It ain't my sewin'-society, an' I ain't got no license ter gossip," he decided.

Afternoon succeeded forenoon, and as steadily hastened away. The sun neared the western horizon, but no discoveries had been made.

Jones was in a serious mood. Quite a trench had been opened, but the mound had yielded nothing.

What had become of pre-historic man?

Joshua's spade struck some hard substance.

"Don't feel like a stone," he remarked.

"Dig carefully!" the professor directed, eagerly. "We may be on the verge of a discovery. Turn the earth with great caution."

Joshua proceeded calmly, but every step told. Little by little he uncovered an oblong object until it was fully revealed. A box, earth-covered and moldy, was before them. Its contents remained to be seen.

CHAPTER IX.

WHAT WAS FOUND IN THE MOUND.

"HERE we be!" quoth Joshua. "We've got some old-timer, but he must 'a' been a dwarf, ter hev sech a wounded small coffin."

"It is only a modern box," Jones returned, in a tone of disappointment.

Spicy Jim said nothing, but one fact impressed him strongly. The box was the exact counterpart of that which Temple Lloyd and his party had dug up the night before.

"Throw it out," the professor added, indifferently.

Joshua lifted the box.

"Say, somethin' is in it!" he declared. "It's heavy."

He tossed it to the higher ground, and the way in which it fell corroborated his last statement.

"Break it open!" Mr. Jones directed.

Spicy Jim took a pick, and easily forced back the cover. When this was done they saw a quantity of paper inside—a number of pieces rolled around certain cylindrical substances. All was in fair state of preservation. The boy did not wait for orders, but unrolled one of the papers.

The covering gave way suddenly, and a score of five-dollar gold-pieces dropped back loosely into the box.

Silence followed the discovery. The gold was a rare sight to Joshua and Jim, while the professor was simply astonished. Then a look of disappointment appeared on his face.

"There is nothing ancient about that," he remarked.

"It's mighty pleasant modern stuff," declared his younger apprentice.

"Only money."

"Only money! Say, boss, ef it raises a feelin' o' contempt in yer mind, jest say the word an' I'll take it off yer hands. I hate ter see a feller bowed down with affliction, by gum! Do I hear yer whisper that Spicy Jim kin relieve yer of the yarler boys?"

The professor did not answer, but, kneeling by the box, looked further. He could see nothing except similar rolls, but he did not look to see if they contained money. He disarranged the whole, anxious to satisfy himself whether there was anything more, and another discovery followed.

He found a paper, neatly folded and but a trifle discolored, and proceeded to unfold it.

When he had done so he perceived several lines of writing, or printing, in strange characters.

"What does it say?" Spicy Jim demanded.

"I don't know; it is in a language unknown to me. It is not English, Latin, Greek, French or German. Can it be—"

Deluded by the momentary hope that he had encountered a trace of pre-historic man, he

looked more closely at one of the golden coins. It was of United States manufacture, and bore the date of 1859.

There was nothing pre-historic about that.

"The paper seems to be a cipher," he went on, indifferently. "Some one had something to say which he would not trust even the earth to keep secret. It may refer solely to the money, but it is likely that there is more to it."

"May be the hist'ry of a crime!" interrupted Spicy Jim, eagerly.

"It is possible."

"Ain't there no way ter read it?"

"If it is a simple cipher, in which each letter of the alphabet is represented by a private character, and the arrangement is adhered to strictly, it can be deciphered easily. Certain letters, like the vowels, and so forth, occur much more frequently than others, and any one who has had a little practice cannot long be baffled."

"Hev you had practice?"

"A little."

"Better try yer luck."

"I will, though I am not encouraged by the looks of the cipher."

"It does look atrocious."

"A shrewd maker can so juggle a cipher that a vast deal of labor is needed to unravel it. If this has been done, I can promise nothing."

"Anyhow, we've got the money."

"Yes."

"It's good ter see!"

Spicy Jim rattled the yellow coins in his hand and was strongly impressed, but the professor was calm and indifferent. Had he been a practical man he would have exulted in the possession of the money at that particular stage of affairs, when Mrs. Parsons threatened to take possession of the Rivington street house. He was not practical, and his principal feeling was disappointment that science had not been benefited thus far.

"They're dandies!" Jim declared. "Tell yer what, we're the boys fer big strikes. Why can't we go inter ther biz reg'lar? We might announce in the papers that we does sech work. Wot'll we call ourselves? I hev it—the Bowery Band! That's us—the Bowery Band, gold diggers an' treasure-elocidators. Yowlin' wild-cats! wot a scheme! Makes me see a wision in which I hev a bank-book on every cash institution in N' York. Yes, by gum!"

The professor aroused from thought.

Carry the box and contents to the house," he directed. "I want to search it carefully."

"Wot's this mark on't?"

Spicy Jim knelt quickly and brushed a little accumulated mold from the cover.

"Here we be!" he added.

"What?" cried Jones. "'Amos Case! Why, he was the former owner of the old house."

"The murdered man?"

"Yes."

"We're gittin' down ter sole-leather facks."

"He must have buried the gold."

"Why should he?"

"Case was one whose life was not wholly happy. That's about all I can say of him. He was a relative of my late wife, and of Bertha, but his affairs were clearly known only to himself. I don't know why he should bury this gold."

Mr. Jones made a motion, and Joshua took the box and carried it to the house.

Spicy Jim experienced a peculiar feeling when, by the professor's direction, he saw it set upon the same table where its mate had rested the other night. Where was the first box now, and where the Woman in White?

Once more the apprentice was inclined to confide in Jones, but he again postponed it.

He had a sudden idea.

The professor went all through the box. He looked at every piece of paper, hoping for further clew, and then, finding none, turned to the cipher. He gave half an hour's study to this, and then shook his head and looked at the time.

"The cryptogram is not susceptible to ordinary methods," he remarked, "and, as the hour is growing late, we will cease work and return to New York. This paper I will put into the hands of an expert, my good friend Professor Emile Lajeunesse. If any one can solve it, he can."

"Reckon you don't need no solver on the gold."

Mr. Jones glanced at the glittering coins with perfect indifference.

"Money is all right in its way, and, as I dare say this really belongs to Bertha, I will take good care of it. James, you may get the horse ready for our return."

"Say, kin I hev a favor did onto me?"

"What is it?"

"Let me stay here over night."
 "But there is no bed."
 "I kin sleep on the floor."
 "And no way of securing the house."
 "I ain't afeerd."
 "Tramps may come in."
 "Then they'll tramp out ag'in. I'll sail inter them so impetu's an' rabid that they'll lose their kiver, an' their ribs an' braces will all fall out. Serious, boss, wot's the use o' my goin' all the way ter the home-roost o' the Bowery Band? I'm young an' need a p'izon sight o' sleep. Let me take it right here."

The professor was not wholly in sympathy with the idea, though it was plain that, with proper conveniences, it would be the best way to remain on the scene if their work was to be prolonged; but he finally yielded and gave consent.

Josh Green winked at the boy.
 "There is them who is fly, an' them as ain't fly," he sagely remarked. "Durin' the big rain in Virginny, when I's a soldier, in 1863, ev'ry ox an' hoss was drowned off the face o' the land, but it was a powerful year fur alligators an' sharks."

The remark was wholly obscure to Jones, but Spicy Jim knew that Josh had penetrated his desire to use his eyes during the night.

The professor gave his young assistant money to buy food, and then, a little later, the two men entered the wagon and drove away, taking the money with them.

Jim was left sole occupant of the field of action.

"This is right interestin'," he observed, with satisfaction. "I've got the house ter myself, an' I feel clean through my ribs an' braces that I shall git paid for spreadin' my umbrella here, ter-night. Ef the Woman in White, or Temple Lloyd, don't show up, it will be a wonder. Bet yer there's fun ahead, Spicy Jim!"

He improved the last of daylight to go over the house thoroughly from top to bottom, but without result.

It was precisely like any other dilapidated, deserted house, as far as he could see.

There was a hotel one-fourth of a mile away. He went to that place and had supper, and then returned. He brought with him a lantern, filled and ready for use, but did not light it. He was not afraid of the darkness, and did not intend to warn off any possible visitor by thus betraying his presence.

It was well that he was so prudent, for most exciting events were at hand.

The hour was nearing ten o'clock, he believed, when he heard unusual sounds in the yard. He went to the window—a team was driving in, with two persons in the vehicle.

CHAPTER X.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

"HULLO! this is more of a blow-out than I expected. Either the enemy is bold, or this ain't the enemy. What's up? Who be they? Wot they goin' ter do?"

Spicy Jim peered out of the window and watched closely as these questions passed through his mind. The occupants of the vehicle were a man and a woman. The former assisted the latter to alight, and then secured the horses to a tree.

Other trees, the shrubbery, and the house, itself, then made the team invisible from the street.

The new-comers lost no time, but proceeded to enter the house as soon as other preparations had been made.

"That's right!" was Jim's mental comment of encouragement. "Waltz right up ter the bar an' take yer bitters. I'll lay low an' see yer brand."

Up the stairs came the couple, and entered the room, where, during the last few hours, the two tin boxes had set on the table for awhile. Spicy Jim entered the adjoining room and again utilized the broken panel.

There was darkness and silence beyond, but the man was moving, and he soon struck a match. Then a light was made by means of a lamp he had brought along. He turned up the wick, and he and his companion were brought into plain view.

Spicy Jim looked eagerly.

"By gum!" he muttered.

The intruders were Temple Lloyd and Mrs. Parsons!

For some time neither spoke. He was looking at her, she was looking all around the room. Her manner was curious, but perfectly calm:

"I can hardly believe this is the same room," she observed, at last.

"But it is?" Lloyd questioned.

"Oh! yes; here Amos Case lived for years, and here, I suppose, he died—of old age!"

A smile accompanied the last words.

"He was old—yes," Lloyd replied. "But who killed him?"

"How should I know? A tramp, a thief—he was lawful prey for whoever was on the make, and lived by crime."

"Yet, you do not think they secured his gold?"

"That is uncertain, but, as I've told you, it's dollars to cents that the old man fooled them. He was as shrewd as he was selfish."

Mrs. Parsons went to the wall and sounded it thoughtfully with her hand.

"This is out of my line," she added. "How ought a secret receptacle to sound, anyhow?"

"Hollow. If Case tore away the wall to hide his effects, he would leave a gap behind him—unless it was re-plastered."

Lloyd was imitating Mrs. Parsons, and knocking upon the wall at various points. Spicy Jim grinned with satisfaction.

"Apply ter Prof. Jones ef yer want the yaller boys," he advised, but not in audible tones.

As if to answer this, Mrs. Parsons remarked to Lloyd:

"I don't suppose there was much money, though old Amos was too shrewd to let any one know the truth, but the papers we must have. They are concealed in this house, and I know it."

"Or buried."

"That is not likely."

"If thrust into some obscure place, the rats may have eaten the paper before now."

"Well, if we can't find them, possibly, we'll burn the old ark down. Nobody else shall have them, and I feel that harm is bound to come, now that old Jones has bought this house. Something must be done."

"I'm ready to help all I can; do my level best."

Mrs. Parsons was standing near Lloyd, and she suddenly laid her hand affectionately upon his arm.

"You dear boy!" she purred, like an amiable cat, "you don't know how dear your good will is to me!"

"I hope I can judge by my own feelings," Lloyd answered, as he returned her smile and earnest regard.

And you really care more for me than that odious child Bertha?"

"How can you ask? She is, as you say, a child—a pretty one, perhaps; but unformed mentally, you know. As for you—ah! you are in the prime of glorious womanhood!"

It was a lover's tribute, and seemed to be sincere. Lloyd gazed at her admiringly, and her smile broadened. She could not blush, for, not only had paint and powder made a barrier, but blushing had become a lost art when modesty deserted her.

"Yowlin' wildcats!" whispered Spicy Jim; "of that air Yarler Hair's a specimint o' geolorious womanhood, I'll put up with them as ain't geolorious, by gum!"

Mrs. Parsons's manner grew more affectionate.

"You shall never regret loving me!" she asserted.

"How can I?"

"Love is one thing; money is another. You shall have both."

"Do not couple the two in speaking of you—"

"My dear boy, be still! You are younger than I. I know the value of money. You think your store pays you well. Bah! wait until we have downed old Jones, and I'll show you what a woman's wits can do. I'll make you rich—as rich in money as you are in my love. Which will you prize most?"

"Can you ask?" cried Lloyd.

"Can I? I will not, for I know. More than that, I know you duly prize what you have—a good woman's priceless, tender love!"

Spicy Jim promptly lay down on the floor.

"Hit me with a brick!" he groaned. "Smash me with a perleceman's billy! Climb all over me! Let a Chicago girl step on me, and then, ef I'm alive, make me wear a Boston girl's specks or live in Feladelphy. Let them dire disasters come, but spare me from hearin' Yarler Hair make love. It's a-tearin' the linin' righ orf my stomach, an' I'm pooty sick all over, by gum!"

The eccentric youth did not venture to look again until he heard them resume practical work.

A thorough search was made of the room. The walls were examined, and Lloyd looked carefully to see if any floor-board had ever been meddled with.

While they worked Spicy Jim meditated.

"Bertha is goin' ter get some primers on Mister Man, yender. I b'lieve she's a nice little damsel, an' she shall know how her best feller is sighin' an' breathin' up lurid flame an' brimstone in his love fer Yarler Hair. I notice he didn't glue his lips ter Yarler Hair's an' he may be bamboozlin' her, but I allow I ain't got no great faith in him. There's a brunette nigger in the woodpile som'er's, by gum!"

Lloyd ceased work with an air of impatience.

"Nothing here!" he declared.

"You are right."

"What can we do next?"

"I don't know what to do, I confess. This house is big—if old Amos did not hide his belongings here, they may have been put in any other of the dozen rooms. It's a wide field to go over."

Mrs. Parsons spoke in a voice of irritation and deep disappointment.

"Hadn't I better dig again?" continued Lloyd.

"You have no men to help; it would be a big task for one."

"But we must do something. I regret now that we did not bring a lantern, instead of a lamp. I can go and get one inside of twenty minutes, as there is a store over east a short distance. I suppose it is closed, but I can arouse the man who keeps it. What do you say?"

Mrs. Parsons did not look favorably impressed, but she answered:

"Use your own judgment. We ought to have the lantern, as I now see. It is better to use in the house, too, if we are to search thoroughly."

"Then I'll go and get it. You are not afraid to stay here alone, are you?"

"I?" she laughed. "Hardly! Even if Old Case's ghost should appear, I am not afraid of it. I had him on the hip; I think I could down his ghost, too."

"Then I'm off. Perhaps you had better turn the light down a bit, so as to make secrecy even more certain. Some one might notice it, safe as I think we are."

Mrs. Parsons agreed to the suggestion, and the light was dimmed just enough to take away its glare. Enough remained so that a face was still distinguishable across the room.

Lloyd promised to return in a short time, and then went out. Spicy Jim heard the door close after him when he left the house.

The painted woman, on being left alone, began to walk about the room and look it over. Evidently the place had many memories for her, and they came in a troop. Here and there she paused, and, once, Spicy Jim saw her shiver. He grew tired of watching her, finally, and turned his gaze away.

When he did so he made a discovery.

Mrs. Parsons was no longer alone.

By the door stood the Woman in White!

She had come in noiselessly and, pausing, was watching Mrs. Parsons closely. She sent a momentary chill over Jim. In the semi-obscure she looked particularly ghostly.

Then more practical thoughts came to him. The two women were sure to meet—what would be the result of the encounter?

Mrs. Parsons's back was toward the Woman in White. The former turned, after a little pause, and, raising her eyes, saw the white-robed figure.

Then she made a nervous start—a backward spring—and a scream of terror escaped her lips. Her gaze was riveted upon the intruder, and, after the first cry, she seemed struck dumb with fright.

The Woman in White advanced a few steps and stood in the center of the room in all her ghostly impressiveness. She raised one arm, and the gesture broke the spell which was upon the adventuress.

"Powers of darkness!" the latter cried, "what do you here, nameless thing?"

Slowly, hollowly came the response:

"I seek you, murderess!"

CHAPTER XI.

TWO WOMEN AND A KNIFE.

SPICY JIM could not repress a shiver. The whole scene was dramatic in the extreme, and, though he knew the Woman in White to be as much a creature of the flesh as himself, her manner impressed him strongly. As for Mrs. Parsons, she was the victim of terror, and incapable of coherent thought.

She shrank further back, and was pallid of face wherever the paint did not rule.

"By gum!" Spicy Jim commented, "the ghost is gettin' in her fine work like a hero!"

It was a striking pause, but it came to an end at last. Mrs. Parsons was not a fool, and the strong sense in her nature asserted itself much more quickly than it would have done if she had

led a life less adventurous and unwomanly. Her attitude changed, and her manner suddenly grew defiant.

"What mummery is this?" she cried.

"It is no mummery."

"Bah! You startled me, at first, but the ghost racket don't go down with an old stager like me. What are you doing in this house?"

"And what are you doing, Sarah Selwin?"

Again Mrs. Parsons started, but from a different cause. Quickly she moved forward and turned the light up to its fullest limit. Then her hostile gaze sought the face of the Woman in White. A quick, gasping breath escaped her, and she leaned heavily upon the table.

"So it is you!" she uttered.

"It is I!"

"I thought you dead."

"Yet, you do not think me dead, and present only in ghostly form, as you thought of Amos Case."

The painted woman made an impatient gesture.

"I speak of you. How dare you come here?"

"Why not I, as well as you, Sarah Selwin?"

"You and I are enemies."

"Granted!"

"Suppose—suppose I should have you arrested for a crime, real or alleged?"

Spicy Jim clearly saw that the speaker did not finish as she intended, at first.

"And suppose" retorted the Woman in White, "that I should have you arrested for murdering Amos Case?"

"Where would you get your proof?"

"I have not said that I have proof, but I do believe you were party to the deed."

"Nonsense!"

"Amos Case was slain here. Who could wish to kill him except you? Who could plan it more coldly, cunningly, safely? Who could more artfully avoid arrest?"

Mrs. Parsons moved restlessly.

"Bitterly as you hate me," she answered, "you surely are joking, now. I, kill Case? Absurd!"

"Your manner gives the lie to your denial!"

"You mistake the liar."

"The law dealt with the murder," pursued the Woman in White, with increased force, "and decided that Amos Case died at the hands of persons unknown. I was not seen, nor did I seek to speak on the subject. I would have helped them if I could, but I could not. At times I had vague suspicions; they never took shape until to-night. Now, I suspect you!"

"Great snakes!" muttered Spicy Jim, "she's a daisy!"

The comment was not misapplied. The Woman in White had become an accuser, and her manner was full of force, yet so tempered with dignity that every word had effect.

Mrs. Parsons regarded the speaker in silence.

"Can it be," the accuser added, "that Mr. Case died at the hands of his wife?"

"Who was his wife?"

"You!"

The painted woman drew a deep breath.

"What mad idea will you have next?"

"Do you deny it?"

"I do."

"You deny in vain. You bewitched Amos Case, destroyed the happiness of his final years and robbed him; yet you did it under the shield of law. Do not deny it again; unknown to you, I witnessed the marriage ceremony!"

"It occurs to me that you are a dangerous woman."

"I am dangerous to you."

"Have you counted the cost?"

"You cannot hate me more than you do."

"Hate you!" echoed Mrs. Parsons, in a hard voice. "Oh! what a weak and idiotic thing is woman's hate when it vents itself solely in breath! That may be your idea of what a woman of nerve does when she hates; you may think she relieves her mind only by the use of words; but you are not too old to learn. I will give you a lesson!"

The situation had changed. It was now the painted woman that exhibited impressive force. She did more. There was something in her manner which made the Woman in White move back a step.

"Oh! fool, fool that you are!" the adventuress added, harshly. "You accuse me of having slain Amos Case; you think me bold enough—wicked enough, if you like the term—to do that deed, yet you imagine me so weak that I would stand still and let another woman ruin me. Fool! fool!"

"What do you mean?"

Mrs. Parsons suddenly caught her accuser by the wrist.

"That we will settle this matter right here!" she hissed, in reply.

The Woman in White struggled to escape.

"Let me go!" she panted.

The adventuress laughed scornfully.

"Let you go? Let you go to make public accusation against me? Fool! fool!"

"I command you to let me go!" returned the prisoner, her voice trembling, and as weak as her own slender wrist.

"You shall go—out of the world!"

"Release me!"

"From life? Yes. I will. You shall go—go where you will never tattle against me. Oh! fool, fool! Did you think you could stand face to face with Sarah Selwin, in this lonely house, and defy and threaten her? How little you measured our respective strength of body and mind! You are all woman, I am part man and part fiend. I own it, I glory in it! Woman, this was Amos Case's death-room; it shall be yours too!"

Rapidly, vehemently, mercilessly spoke the adventuress, and, suddenly, she drew a knife from the bosom of her dress.

It flashed in the lamp-light, and the Woman in White uttered a startled cry.

"Let go my wrist!" she gasped, seeking to break the tenacious hold.

"Why don't you plead for mercy?"

"Never, never!"

"Then die—die unprayed for by yourself, or any one else!"

Up went the knife. Murderous fury was in its owner's eyes, and another moment would have seen it fall with fatal effect—but there was an interruption.

As the hand went up another set of fingers closed around Mrs. Parsons's wrist, and her arm was jerked backward over her shoulder with force which, it seemed, nearly dislocated it.

The knife fell harmlessly to the floor.

One more exhibition of strength on the part of the unseen assailant, and her hold on the Woman in White was broken.

Instead of a triumphant murderess she stood a baffled assassin.

She was not crushed mentally, and she turned upon the one who had interrupted. Spicy Jim stood there in nonchalant composure, one foot planted close to the knife, which was sticking in the floor where it had fallen point downward.

"That's high-jinks enough for now!" the Bowery boy coolly declared. "We'll proceed to take a period off-duty, an' ef anybody's killed, it won't be her!"

Mrs. Parsons did not recognize him as any one she had ever seen before, but the interruption made her furious. Was she to be thwarted by a mere boy?

"Little wretch!" she hissed, "was it you who interfered here?"

"You bet it was!"

"Then take the consequences!"

Not yet was she disarmed. Out of her dress came a revolver, and she expertly leveled it at Spicy Jim's breast.

CHAPTER XII.

SPICY JIM'S NERVE.

THE Woman in White uttered a cry of alarm, for it looked as if Mrs. Parsons certainly would be able to carry out her desperate purpose. In her hands the revolver would do fatal work, and two shots, if well aimed, would dispose of Spicy Jim and the Woman in White forever.

It was the purpose of the adventuress to make a clean sweep and hide her secrets from the world.

When the revolver was presented and her finger on the trigger, success seemed certain, but right there was where the two women made an error in so thinking.

Spicy Jim was not in love with the idea of being sacrificed to accommodate an evil woman, and his courage only rose the higher in the face of danger. Realizing the necessity of prompt action, he darted at Mrs. Parsons like a flash. He had only a step to go, and, just as the revolver came to the level, he knocked it up and made a clutch for its possession.

The struggle was brief.

The adventuress was strong, but Jim's impetuosity was too much for her. Before she could collect her own energy fully, he had wrested the weapon away.

He put it behind him and nodded to her coolly.

"Got any more thingumbobs in yer arsenal? Got a rifle, cannon, boomerang, bomb or stiletto? Ef so, trot 'em out! Let the circus go on, by all means! 'Rastle out the weapons o' war, an' we'll use 'em cordin' ter West P'int tick-tacks. We'll cut, an' slash, an' slay, an' hew our bigness, regardless o' cuticle, bones or sech trifles. Yes, by gum!"

The apprentice's happy-go-lucky composure was not imitated by the adventuress.

"You little wretch!" she sibilated.

"What say, Lady Yellow Hair?"

"I will kill you!"

"When?"

"When? I know not, but the time will come; I'll have satisfaction for what you have done to-night. I'll follow you; I'll hunt you down. The world is not wide enough to hide you; eternity is not long enough to make me forget my hatred. Beware of me!"

"Mum, you make me tired!" Spicy Jim calmly responded. "You weary me. Chestnuts is nowhere compared to you. You wrench my joints all asunder—an', fer that matter, all ter *thunder*—with yer cheap talk. Better go on the Bowery stage, as a yowlin' Mazeppa, or some sech crazy whooper-up!"

Mrs. Parsons did not heed this address. Having freed her mind, she abandoned heroics, and turned her gaze from the Woman in White to Jim, and then back again.

She was calm and dangerous, but at fault.

"I suppose, woman, this boy is your ally?" she questioned, addressing her enemy.

"No."

"I'm nobody's ally," Jim asserted. "I'm a partner in the Bowery Band, with all my ribs and braces sound, an' my kiver on, unfaded an' unworn."

"Why did you meddle here?"

"To save a decent person from a female tough."

"I begin to see. What will you two do next?"

She looked at the Woman in White, but the latter shook her head.

"I can't explain. I would not if I could, but, now, my plans are unformed. I'll say this much to you, and that is all I have to say."

She made a motion to leave the room. Mrs. Parsons glanced longingly at the knife which remained sticking in the floor, but Spicy Jim winked sagely and, picking it up, put it away in his pocket.

The Woman in White walked to the door, and there turned for a moment.

"Young man, if you value your life you will not remain here any longer than is necessary!" she declared, and then went out quickly.

Mrs. Parsons did not stir, but the Bowery Boy could imagine what a hard thing it was for her to see her enemy go. The latter had made severe charges. She had admitted that she could prove nothing, but there are times when the pointing of a finger will fan the smoldering fire of vague doubt into the furious blaze of suspicion.

Perhaps the Woman in White would go straight to an officer of law—and Mrs. Parsons could not prevent it.

Seeing that she was all absorbed in thought, Jim bethought himself that he would never have a better chance to withdraw from the scene. Noiselessly he retreated through the door with the broken panel, and, from there, out of the house. He wanted to find the Woman in White and make an alliance, offensive and defensive, with her, but she had disappeared entirely.

While he was searching, Temple Lloyd returned with the lantern. The young man appeared unconcerned, and entered the house at once.

Anxious to hear what was said, Jim followed.

"Now, Mrs. Parsons, we are ready for work," the merchant announced, displaying the lantern.

"I am going back to New York, at once!" the adventuress declared.

"Going back?"

"Immediately!"

"But our search—"

"Must be postponed. I cannot attend to it now. I—I have had a shock, and can endure this place no longer. The house is gloomy, dark and damp. I can't exist here any longer. Let us go!"

"Has anything happened?"

"No."

"I will go if you say so, but we lose a fine opportunity by leaving with our work undone."

"I care not; I want to get home and think!"

"We will go as you say."

Lloyd spoke in a tone of disappointment, but with perfect submission to her will. She went quickly to his side and laid her hand on his arm.

"Temple, whatever happens you will be true to me?"

"Can you doubt it, Sadie?"

"I do not doubt, but I want your lips to say it."

"Hear me, then! We have met and formed our opinions under circumstances not wholly right. Well, the darkness only makes the bond stronger. Ordinary persons can afford to waver in their love—to fall by the way. We cannot! Whatever is dark makes the tie more binding; we cannot change. No; come what may, Sadie, I shall always regard you as I do now."

"May heaven bless you! I will kill off all my enemies so they cannot harass me; I will make you rich out of the pockets of susceptible nabobs; we will soon go to Europe and live out our lives. Ah! you shall know what woman's love is!"

The adventuress was all in earnest, but Spicy Jim was too much amazed to make his usual comment.

The matter-of-fact way in which she mixed references to love with those to plot and crime was amazing.

If Temple Lloyd shrunk from her he gave no sign. He smiled upon her, and she seemed well satisfied. Lloyd was far above the social line to which she belonged, or ever had belonged, and he thought it no small matter to captivate him. Yet, there was much of unselfishness in her passion, and she would have made great sacrifices for him.

Possibly she then regretted that her whole past career was black with plots, evil deeds and crimes.

They did not delay any longer, but left the house, entered the waiting vehicle and drove away toward New York.

"So-long!" quoth Spicy Jim. "The air is a good bit purer here now you're gone, an' I feel stronger in my ribs an' braces. Sally Parsons wipes the ginger-snaps—she does, by gum! She's wickeder than an alligator with a week's beard on his teeth. Now for the Woman in White. I want ter jine forces with her; she's a good kind of a ghost ter know."

He searched both the grounds and the house, and then the street, but failed to find any sign of her.

Evidently, she had been more frightened than the adventuress, and had hastened away as soon as possible.

After waiting until he became sleepy the Bowery Boy decided to humor that feeling. He lay down in a closet near the outer door, where he naturally would hear any intruder, and went to sleep with the revolver and knife seized from Mrs. Parsons by his side.

The night, however, brought no more adventures.

In the morning he ate an early breakfast, and then left the house with a definite purpose in view. He wished to interview an old resident, and believed he had just the man in view.

He found him leaning on the fence, and proceeded, first of all, to talk upon trivial subjects, and then to wind around to that nearest his mind. Proceeding cautiously, he finally reached the question:

"What do you know about the old house over yender?"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE WORK OF AN ENEMY.

THE old resident blinked unsuspiciously as he looked at the storm-beaten walls of the house.

"That's one o' the oldest buildings in these parts," he returned.

"Nobody lives there now, eh?" Spicy Jim inquired.

"Only mice, an' sech."

"Did you know them as did live there?"

"Amos Case was the last," the old resident replied, with a sigh. "He was killed there, an' nobody has keered ter live under its roof sence. Many folks says the house is haunted, an' will be until his murder is revenged—you see, they ain't never found out who did it."

"Who do you think?"

"Dear me! if I had a theory I'd 'a' made it known afore now. I ain't got any."

"Did Case live alone?"

"Yes. He was a queer man, an' more or less a miser, but not the worst person in the world, by any means. Yes, he lived alone a good many years."

"Was he ever married?"

The old resident pulled vigorously at his beard.

"They says not."

"Don't you say so?"

"I don't mind statin' that I've had my doubts. In Case's last years there was a young woman around there a good 'eal, an' folks seen an' talked about it. She was a high-flyer, an' had yeller hair, an' daubed her face over with paint an' powder. It took only half an eye to see that she was a bad lot—a mere ad-

venturess, I say. How Amos met her I never knew, but meet they did, an' he got bewitched. He who had been a hermit branched out as a gallant, an' many's the time a livery team come ter his door an' took him an' Sadie Selwin—that was her name—out ridin'. Yes, poor old Amos made a fool of himself in his last years. He died, but she never showed up at his funeral. It kinder surprised me, for I had fer some time been thinkin' that they was married."

"An' you think so now?"

"I dunno. The question is, ef they was married, why didn't she claim her property, instead o' lettin' it go ter other heirs?"

Here was a puzzler. It perplexed Jim more than the old resident, for Jim had heard the Woman in White declare she had seen the marriage take place.

"Who was t'other heirs?" the umbrella-mender asked, after a pause.

"The stuff went ter a gal named Bertha Howland—jest how she was related I don't know. When I first knowed Amos he had two relatives who passed for sisters. Really, though about of an age, they was first cousins, once removed, ter each other. One married Hannibal Jones, who now owns the old house; the other married Abner Howland. Both is dead, now."

"But Bertha ain't?"

"No. She was Mrs. Howland's da'rter, and heired all the property, owin' ter the way the line o' kinship run."

"You are sure she was Mrs. Howland's da'rter?"

"Certain."

"Did they know that Sadie Selwin?"

"Dear me, no! Do you suppose nice women like them would soil their skirts by touchin' an adventuress like the Selwin woman? I should hope not. No; they would never even speak ter her, an' it made her boilin' mad. She was bad, all through; that woman was the worst I ever seen."

Spicy Jim shook his head gravely.

He was getting deeper into mystery.

When at the professor's house Mrs. Parsons, in Jim's presence, had told Jones that, a few years before, she had convinced his wife that she—Mrs. Parsons—was Bertha's mother, and, in the face of that assertion, Jones, on that occasion, had not dared to order the adventuress out.

How there could be doubt on that subject Jim did not see.

There was silence for some time between the old resident and the Bowery boy, and the latter asked:

"Do you know a woman 'round here who wears a white dress, white vail an' white gloves?"

"Hev you heered of it?" was the subdued inquiry.

"Heered o' what?"

"The ghost!"

"Oh! there's a ghost, is there?"

"I ain't goin' ter say that, after havin' disbelieved in ghosts all my life. No, I won't b'lieve it, but there is them who do. This woman has been seen several times at night, lately, an' many rushes to the belief that she's a genuine spook—but that's nonsense."

"Who kin she be?"

"That I don't know."

"Where does she travel mostly?"

"Onl' around the old house."

"She must live near here."

"Should s'pose so, but where? Ef anybody knows they won't tell."

Other questions Spicy Jim asked about the Woman in White, but without gaining any further light. Until within a fortnight no one had ever seen her, as far as the old resident knew, but since that time she had several times been observed around the old house. Superstitious persons believed her to be a phantom; practical people, who had tried to catch her, had been frustrated utterly by her agility and the tangle of the shrubbery back of the house.

When the old resident had been talked dry Spicy Jim went back to headquarters, and was just in time to meet Professor Jones and Josh Green.

They had driven up from the city, and were ready for fresh work on the mound.

Operations were re-commenced, and the spades and picks kept busy. Hours passed and the excavations grew larger, but no sign of pre-historic man or his handiwork was discovered.

By noon Mr. Jones was in a very serious mood. The work was not completed, but over half of the mound had been opened, and he was not enough of a fanatic to be sanguine at that stage of affairs. He was reluctantly arriving at the conclusion that the "mound" was nothing but

an embankment made since Henry Hudson first looked upon Manhattan Island.

Spicy Jim had something to say to his employer, and did not long neglect the chance.

"How's the folks, perfessor?"

"Quite well."

"You're lucky ter hev sech a charmin' young lady as Bertha ter brighten yer home."

"I am, indeed."

"I b'lieve her mother was yer sister?"

"No; she was sister to my wife—at least, so they were pleased to term the tie of blood. Really, they were first cousins, once removed; but they loved each other so that they always claimed to be sisters. Many never knew different, as they were reared together."

"Ef there was sech good will, how does it happen you're on the outs with Mrs. Parsons, now?"

"With Mrs. Parsons?"

"Yes, Bertha's mother."

"She is not Bertha's mother! At least—"

Jones paused, hesitated, and said no more.

"She claimed ter be," put in Jim.

"Would you believe her?"

"Confidential-like, I wouldn't. But, ef I may be so brash, w'ot is the state of affairs which makes it possible fer her ter put in the claim?"

"That I can't tell you."

"But I might help yer."

"Never mind; let the subject drop. Green, are you ready for work?"

The professor's manner showed that he meant all he said, and did not intend to have family secrets invaded. Perhaps he made a mistake just then. Spicy Jim felt that he ought to tell all he knew, and was eager to do so.

The rebuff, however, changed the current of his mind, and he determined to keep his secret awhile longer.

Labor was resumed, and, until three o'clock, the spades and picks were kept busy. Then Jones suddenly rose from where he had been sitting.

"Carry the tools to the house," he directed.

"We will go home at once!"

His gloomy utterance satisfied Jim that he had nearly, or quite, given up hope of finding anything pre-historic in the mound, but neither of the apprentices commented on the early cessation of work. They obeyed orders, and a few minutes later, they were on their way to New York.

Nothing of importance occurred on the journey, and their homes were reached in due time.

At twilight Spicy Jim sat in the room where he and Joshua had mended so many umbrellas, looking across the yards to the room occupied by Mrs. Parsons. He had a glimpse of her several times as she passed the window, but she appeared to be alone, and he saw nothing of interest.

He meditated a good deal in the attempt to decide upon some plan by which he could learn more about her, and about her past crimes and future plots. He was bold to an extreme, and was ready to take a good deal of risk, but he did not see how he was to accomplish his work at once.

After the affair at the old house she would be sure to recognize him if they met again, and this fact stood in the way of many schemes which occurred to him.

He retired at an early hour, for work and loss of sleep had made him weary. On this night he hoped to make up for lost time and rise in the morning refreshed.

He was soon deep in slumber.

After awhile he had a dream.

He thought that an enemy had taken him to the top of a high mountain and rolled him over a sloping bluff. He went down slowly, but in a way not to his liking, bumping from one point to another. On reaching the bottom he was placed on a railroad hand-car and another journey began which was quite as unpleasant as the first, for the way seemed strangely rough. At last they entered a dimly-lighted station, and his captor kicked him vigorously to arouse him.

He did arouse—in reality.

He awoke from his dream and looked up, but the awakening was not pleasant.

Tom Bates was standing over him.

CHAPTER XIV.

TOM BATES PLAYS HIGH CARDS.

It was a most astonishing discovery, but another followed close upon it. Spicy Jim was not in his own room, but in one which, strange to him though it was, was plainly a basement kitchen.

Not one thing therein except Tom Bates was

familiar to the umbrella-mender, and he was utterly bewildered to know how he had changed places. The fact was almost as strange as the things he had imagined in his dream.

Bates bestowed another kick upon him.

"Be you awake, youngster?" asked the rough, in his usual husky voice.

"I seem ter be," Jim admitted.

"Git up!"

The boy was not reluctant to obey, but, as he did so, he made a new discovery.

"Say, wot are my wrists tied tergether fer?" he demanded, with spirit.

"Ter keep you out o' mischief."

"Untie them!"

"Oh! say, come off; you make me weary, young feller. Ter save talk let me state right in few words that I went inter your room; give ye a dose of chloroform; carried ye down-stairs on my shoulder; put ye in a cab an' brought yer here. Now, don't wrench yer jaws apart by firin' questions at me!"

Spicy Jim comprehended that there had been some foundation for his dream, but how Bates had gained entrance to the room was not so clear.

"Where be I, now?" Jim proceeded.

"Can't you see?"

"I mean, what house is this?"

"None o' yer business!"

"What yer goin' ter do with me?"

"What we please."

"Well, you'd better leave me go, by gum!"

"Boy, I expect the boss in this job every minute; when she comes you kin spin all the orations you want ter. I'm only a passenger—though, havin' bought a ticket, I guess I shall be heard from more or less from this on."

A door opened and a woman entered. Jim was prepared for what he saw; it was Mrs. Parsons. A sarcastic smile overspread her painted face as she met the prisoner's gaze.

"How do you like this?" she asked. "Any improvement over the situation of last night?"

"Rather—for you."

"You do not seem so pert."

"My canary-haired friend, don't you jump at conclusions; there may be a hook under the bait which will wound yer delikit gills like Peter X, Carvin'-knife. Folks sometimes smile when they're unhappy, especially drunkards. Then, ag'in, a contented mind may lurk behind a frown on a Roman nose. That's me!"

The Bowery boy's coolness was proof against all things, but he did not fail to see that he was in danger. The fact was printed, as it were, on Mrs. Parsons's face.

"Boor!" she commented, scornfully, and then, after a pause, added: "Matters are not all your way on this occasion. If I had recognized you, last night, as a friend of Old Jones I would have found some way to conquer you. I did not recognize you, though I saw something familiar in your face. Afterwards, when it flashed upon me that you were the same boy I saw at Jones's, I was startled. You have been spying upon me!"

"Guess that don't trouble you much."

"Why do you think so?"

"You are a pretty tough old hen, and I should pity the hawk that gobbled yer up in his claws!"

The adventuress ignored the comment.

"What have you learned?" she added.

"More than some folks forget."

"Where is your friend, the woman who dresses in white?"

"Don't know."

"It is false—you do."

"Mebbe you know my biz better than I do."

"I am positive that you know where she is, and I am going to learn. Will you tell me at once?"

"No, sir!"

"Think again."

"I can't tell, fer I don't know."

"Listen to me! You are in a room which, when the door is closed, is so constructed, thanks to the work my companion and I have to-day put upon it, that no air can enter or escape. If you refuse to tell me where that woman is, your feet, as well as your hands, will be bound, and then the illuminating gas will be turned on. Do you see?"

"I may."

"You have heard of countrymen being suffocated by blowing out the gas, instead of turning it off. You will be in that same fix, except that we shall deliberately let the gas escape, till the room and suffocate you."

"Well, you're a great old high-roller, ain't you?" Jim commented, sarcastically.

"Will you tell and live, or refuse and die?"

"Mum, I'm givin' you the straight tip when I say I can't tell ye where the Woman in White

is. I never seen her except at the old house, an' she skipped out like a will-o'-whisk-um an' couldn't be found after. That's all I know."

"Bates, bind him, and then turn on the gas!"

The person addressed tipped his hat rakishly down over one eye before he replied.

"Sally, before we do that," he made answer, "jest waltz ter the other end o' the room. I hev a word ter whisper in yer ear."

"Make haste, then."

Mrs. Parsons followed him without further argument, but with an air of impatience. They imagined themselves wholly beyond Jim's hearing, perhaps, but, if so, they reckoned without knowledge of the keenness of his hearing.

"See here!" began Tom, "I've been a good helper ter you. Eh?"

The adventuress looked at him sharply. Even one a total stranger to him could have seen that something of importance was coming. Her answer was sweet and amiable.

"Yes, Tom," she agreed.

"How about my reward?"

"Haven't you had yer reward?"

"I should be a fool ter deny that your goodness ter me has made me as happy as a clam at high tide, an' we hev gone on tergether like kittens. But, Sally, how about Temple Lloyd?"

"What do you mean?"

"It looks ter me as ef you're proposin' ter put him ahead o' me in yer regards."

"That is nonsense!"

"You're sweet on him, an' he on you," declared Tom, sulkily.

"Haven't I told you my supposed love for him was all a pretense?"

"Don't you know I kin read? You ain't bean so crafty in your pretended love-making so but I could see it was reel. You are stuck on the dude!"

Mrs. Parsons was accustomed to subduing her rough follower by subtle arts, and she would have followed her usual course on the present occasion had it not been for the last word. That angered her so that she lost her prudence.

"Is that any of your business?"

"Yes; it is my business!" Tom declared, his husky voice growing menacing. "I ain't goin' ter be throwed over fer him."

"How are you going to prevent it?"

"Now you come right down ter hard-pan. Yonder is the boy. You say he's dangerous ter you, an' you want ter put him out o' the way. I say that ef you cut up rusty you shall never hev the chance ter throw me over fer Lloyd. Ef you defy me the boy goes away from here safe, an' what he don't know o' your secrets, I'll tell him. See?"

The adventuress did see. She was no fool, and, her unusual burst of temper being over, she made haste to undo the damage she had caused.

She forced a laugh.

"Tom, you are the most absurd fellow I ever knew. I am disposed not to forgive you for thinking I could take up with Lloyd. Have no fear; I promise not to take up with him."

"An' you'll stick ter me?"

"Yes."

"Prove it!"

"How can I?"

"By marryin' me!"

Mrs. Parsons recoiled.

"By marrying you!" she echoed.

"Yes. I've got tired o' bein' a star-gazer. I want ter know jest where I stand. Ef you care fer me as you say you do, prove it by marryin' me. Then I'll know Lloyd won't come between us."

"But I can't, without committing bigamy. I have several living husbands, already. One must be legal; you would not be that. Don't be absurd, Tommy!"

"That's all a bluff!" the quick-witted rough declared. "I've knowed ye fer years, an' never heard of a husband before. But it ain't of him, or the lack o' him, I want ter speak. Ef you marry me I'll know you can't marry Lloyd. See? Come, now, prove yer devotion ter me; don't talk of a husband you ain't got; give Lloyd the shake, an' marry me!"

"Who?"

"Now!"

"Now? Where is the parson?"

"We'll go ter him at once."

"Give me a little time and—"

"No!" Tom declared. "It's now or never, Sally Parsons! I've worked this thing up, an' ever sence you got sweet on Lloyd, hev waited fer the proper chance. It has come now. Before you turn on the gas fer Spicy Jim you must go out an' marry me! If you refuse, the kid an' I will be spreadin' yer secrets afore another hour. What's yer answer?"

CHAPTER XV.

A GAME OF WITS AND MATRIMONY.

It was an important question, and of vital interest to all there.

Tom Bates, big, burly and brutal, with the face of a prize-fighter and the heart of a hyena, was deeply in love in his peculiar way. He had aided Mrs. Parsons a long time, and worshiped while he aided. Nobody knew better than he that by education, intelligence, rearing and practice, if not by respectability, the adventuress was far above him, but that only made the prize the more desirable.

He awaited her reply eagerly.

Mrs. Parsons was troubled. She knew her brute worshiper well, and now, was well aware that he meant all he said. She wished him at the bottom of the East River, but that was not where he was. She had no intention of marrying him, and she did intend to marry Temple Lloyd. But how was Tom to be managed?

It was a most perplexing situation.

Spicy Jim had not lost a word of the conversation, private though it was supposed to be, and, naturally, he was the most interested person there.

His life was at stake, and depending upon the sequel to the conversation.

"I think you are very inconsiderate, Tom," the adventuress finally made answer. "After we have cruised together in harmony so long you now turn against me—"

"Never! never! I ain't turned against ye!" Tom declared. "Kin you call it that when a man asks yer ter marry him?"

"That's all right, but I object to the way and the time. You seek to drive me into it. I would object most strenuously, for I feel that I ought to be angry, but I won't quarrel with you, Tommy; I like you too well. Hear my promise: To-morrow morning I'll go with you to the parson, and we'll be married!"

Bates shook his head doggedly.

"No, yer don't!"

"Do you refuse?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Sally, your word an' mine ain't worth a pinch o' snuff. We know each other of old; know each other too well to trust in promises either has made."

"Tom, you are a fool!" Mrs. Parsons cried, angrily.

"Fools are dangerous, sometimes," was the sullen answer.

"You try my patience fearfully."

"That ain't the point. Will you marry me, now?"

The adventuress glanced at Spicy Jim.

"Jest so," Tom added. "His future depends on yer decision. Go an' marry me at once, an' you kin dispose o' him, but the gas will never be turned on until you do marry me. See?"

The umbrella-mender waited for the woman's answer greedily. It was a great crisis in his life.

"Have your own way," Mrs. Parsons finally replied. "We will be married at once."

Tom's face brightened wonderfully. He was a very easily-satisfied lover, for her manner was full of irritation, but he cared not how the end was reached. The victory was all he thought of then.

"That's my own girl!" he declared, with grizzly-bear-like tenderness.

"I'll go for a parson at once," she added.

"No!" was the quick, suspicious response. "I'll attend ter that; I know jest the man we want. He ain't overburdened with scruples, but, bein' a full-fledged parson in good standin', will tie the knot as tight as the parson of Trinity or Grace Church."

"Very well; I don't care who does it. Bring him to the basement door, and we will be married there—"

"Why there?"

"I won't go away from my prisoner," she explained, with decision, pointing to Spicy Jim.

"All right. Light the basement hall—"

"No. I'm not going to illuminate the lower part of the house all through, and expose us to prying eyes that may have seen the boy brought in. Your parson shall stand at the door, just inside the stoop; we'll be right in front of him. No strong light, and no publicity for me, when we have work here to do."

Again she indicated Spicy Jim.

"All right, Sally," Bates returned. "We won't argue over a small point like that; I don't keer how much blamed darkness we are married in. Shall I go for the parson now?"

"Yes. How far away does he live?"

"Three blocks."

"Very well; I will be in the lower hall. I'll let you out by the basement door."

They left the room; she turned the key and fastened Jim in alone. Then they went to the front door. Bates asked for a kiss and received it. A few moments more and he was on the street, hurrying away to get his chosen minister.

Sally Parsons swept her hand across her lips.

"The vile wretch!" she exclaimed. "This move of his shall cost him dear. To-night I will fool him to the limit, and then, at first chance, out goes his vile life. He signed his death-warrant when he tried to intimidate me and rule the roost!"

The speaker hurriedly went up the stairs, and encountered the landlady in the parlor-floor hall.

"I want your help!" she declared.

The woman was coarse and brutal; she was unscrupulous; she was bound to the adventuress by the tie of money paid her by that employer.

"What is it, Miss Sadie?" she asked.

"That wretch, my man-ally, is bound to marry me at once."

"What, he?"

"Yes, but I'll foil him. Where is your colored cook?"

"In her room."

"She must marry Bates!"

"Eh?"

"The fool did not stop to think he was dealing with a woman when he pressed his point so bravely. What is his stupid brain compared with mine? He shall marry, not me, but the negress!"

"But he won't do it."

"He will. The hall is dark; the cook is my height and build; he can be tricked. As for the cook, she shall be a widow before two days have passed. Tom Bates sealed his doom when he went up against me. Your cook need not hesitate; as I've said, she shall be a widow quickly. Go for her!"

Mrs. Parsons carried matters with a rush. The colored woman naturally objected, at first, to getting married in such fashion; but she was not troubled with a conscience, and when Mrs. Parsons had put money into her hand generously she resisted no longer.

The three women united their wits to make the scheme a success.

Fortunately for them they were given ample time, and, when Tom Bates finally returned with his "parson," all was ready. Tom knocked at the basement door, and Mrs. Parsons opened it.

"Here we are, Tommy," she observed. "The landlady and the cook are here as witnesses. You had better stand right there, reverend sir, for, otherwise, you may run against the refrigerator."

The "reverend sir" did not object. Tom had tried to account plausibly for a marriage in a dark basement, but the minister—he had disgraced himself and been expelled from the church some months before—had interrupted and declared that he did not care whether he married them there or under a street light.

After a few preliminary words all was ready. Tom reached out for Mrs. Parsons's hand.

A faint light came through from the street and barely touched the minister's back, but the rest of the place was in utter darkness.

A hand was slipped in Tom's, and Mrs. Parsons's voice whispered:

"All ready!"

"Heave ahead, parson!" Tom directed.

The ceremony began. Mrs. Parsons was nervous, and excusably so. The negress had no race peculiarity of speech, and was a clever woman, but there was danger that Bates would discover that it was not his adored one who was making the responses.

When the first crisis came the cunning adventuress rustled her skirts, so that the bride's voice would be less distinct.

Tom said nothing.

The ceremony progressed, and not a suspicion entered the groom's mind. He was so elated that there was even less danger than Mrs. Parsons supposed; he scarcely heeded the tone of the replies, as long as they were freighted with the right words.

It was over at last, and luckless Mr. Bates had married the colored cook!

He wanted to seal the compact with a kiss, and was not disappointed. It was Mrs. Parsons who accommodated him, and he was in the highest realm of bliss.

"You've done a good job, parson!" he averred. "an' I hope I kin do as much fer you, some time. I can't act as parson at yer weddin', nor

find ye a bride as beautiful as mine. There ain't another so lovely in New York!"

A slight laugh involuntarily escaped the landlady.

"You may snicker!" quoth Tom, with dignity, "but you ain't in it. I say my wife is the pootiest woman in this city!"

"Some likes blondes, an' some likes brunettes," answered the landlady, "an' so some would like a complexion jest opposite ter your wife's; but it ain't fer me ter critikise. I wishes ye joy, sir!"

She went up-stairs with the cook, and Bates proceeded to dismiss the minister. When this was done he had Mrs. Parsons to himself.

"Now, darlin'," he remarked, "we'll see ter the boy."

"True. Spicy Jim must die, at once!"

The adventuress unlocked the door of the kitchen, and they entered. The gas was still burning, but Spicy Jim was not where they had left him.

Mrs. Parsons swept a quick glance around.

Spicy Jim was not to be seen!

He was no longer in the room.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE JAWS OF THE TRAP.

It was the following evening. The hour was nine o'clock.

Two persons turned from Broadway into Great Jones street. One was a boy who had a soft hat pulled well down over his eyes; the other was a woman who was dressed in black, even to the veil which covered her face. The first was Spicy Jim; the second was she whom he had been accustomed to call the "Woman in White." In her black apparel the name was not appropriate, and, as she had told Jim to call her Mrs. Hunter, we will now know her by that name.

They paused a few feet from the corner.

"No signs o' his nibs yet," Jim observed.

"No."

"I'm afeerd they will 'light out."

"Then we will have them arrested at the door. But I think they will not go to-night, anyhow, for our new ally said there was no sign of their vacating. Mrs. Parsons, as she calls herself, is a desperate and defiant woman, and her reckless courage has run away with her judgment, it seems."

"We'll fix 'em, ter-night."

"Unless they beat us out. We are going to dare a good deal of danger."

"It's worth it ter find out jest how Temple Lloyd stands. Pretty Bertha believes in him, an' we must know fer sure whether he is saint or sinner afore we spring our trap."

"Your description of her makes me willing to dare a good deal for her sake," Mrs. Hunter replied.

"You are a hero; that's what you are!" Spicy Jim declared, with enthusiasm. "Nobody short of a hero would 'a' dared come in an' rescued me as you did last night."

"There was danger, but, having made up my mind to baffle that woman, I invaded the house in Houston street boldly."

"An' did a tremenjous job."

"How vividly it all remains in my mind," added Mrs. Hunter. "I traced Mrs. Parsons and Bates from this street to Houston, and, later, saw you brought in the cab, insensible, and conveyed to the house. When the servant went out on an errand I boldly entered by the unlocked door."

"Bravo for you, mum!"

"I soon learned that you were in the kitchen, but they were there, too, talking of suffocating you with gas. When Bates went for the minister, and Mrs. Parsons hurried up-stairs to see the landlady, I perceived my chance. She had left the key in the door. I turned it, entered, and released you."

"You bet!"

"The return of the party cut off our retreat, and we were obliged to hide at the end of the hall while Tom Bates was being married to the colored cook."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Jim, gleefully.

"When the minister was sent away, Bates and Mrs. Parsons again entered the kitchen to carry out their infamous plot against you. That was our chance. We ran to the basement door, unlocked it and hurried out on the street. Probably we were not clear of the area when your escape was discovered, but we boarded a street-car and saw your enemies no more."

"You saved my life, that's all," Jim returned. "They was goin' ter turn on the gas an' do me up, sure."

"That is true."

"As fer the janitor where Joshua Green an'

me lives, we scared him, ter-day, inter a confession that Bates bribed him ter let Tom inter the house. Then Tom come ter my room, chloroformed me, carried me out, put me in the cab an' took me ter Houston street. I had had dreams through it all, an' they'd been a heap worse ef I'd known Bates had me."

"Anyway, his feat at bribery, gave us a suggestion, and we have retaliated by bribing Mrs. Parsons's servant. I hope good will come of it."

"Mebbe the servant won't show up."

"Wait! I believe this is she!"

A slovenly-looking girl was coming rapidly down the street.

"Here I be!" she panted, as she came up.

"Is anything wrong?" Mrs. Hunter asked.

"No; quite the contrary. It is now certain that Temple Lloyd will visit Mrs. Parsons. Come with me and I'll soon have you in the room next to hers."

"Lead on!"

The direction was obeyed, and all were soon in front of the house where Mrs. Parsons and Bates had quarters. As neither was then in, it was thought safe to proceed boldly.

They entered the house. No one appeared to challenge or scrutinize them, and, as the servant had promised, they were soon ensconced in the room next to Mrs. Parsons's. A transom, which was supposed to be fast closed, afforded means of overhearing what was said.

By looking across the yard the windows of Joshua Green's quarters could be seen. That room was dark, but, having made due arrangements, Spicy Jim was sure that Josh was on the watch, and ready to go for a policeman upon a given signal.

Jim and his companion settled down to await the coming of their game.

They were not delayed a great while.

A key rattled in the lock; the door opened, and the adventuress and Temple Lloyd entered. Mrs. Parsons was in a tender mood, and began to say various sweet things to the merchant, but his mind was running on practical matters.

"Time is precious," he finally observed.

"Suppose we do our business, first of all?"

"A good idea."

"Where do we begin?"

"Anywhere, so that we shape our plans to ruin Hannibal Jones and the girl."

"You are bound to move into their house?"

"Yes."

"It probably can be done, for Jones is not the man to make a big fight. Once convince him, and he would go down like a ten-pin. But we do not want to act rashly. He may have a lawyer, and, if he does, we either must have good proof, or be able to head off any efforts to catch our evidence tripping. You have the paper of release with you, I presume."

"Yes. It made me laugh to see old Jones search for it in his desk when Bates and I called there. I had bribed their servant—an easy thing, as they had given her warning—to steal it for me. Jones searched in vain; even then I had the release."

"It is possible that, when he had it, it was shown to some of his friends, who may be ready to swear to its terms. Pray let me read it."

She promptly passed over a folded paper. He read it carefully.

"It is merely an agreement on your part not to claim or molest Bertha," he added.

"That's all."

He laid the paper on the table beside him.

"Who was that white-clad woman who made such a scene in the country house?"

Mrs. Parsons hesitated before making reply, but it was only because she dared not tell of her own misdemeanors; she did not doubt Lloyd's loyalty to her.

"As I've told you before, I was once acquainted with Amos Case. At the time I met him he was contemplating marriage in his old age, and the object of his passion was a Mrs. Hunter. When he saw me his feelings changed, and he deserted her. That's why she hates me—though why should she? I would not have married Case, even if he had lived to ask me."

The adventuress was very much afraid that Lloyd would press matters at this point, and bring out the fact that she had married Case, so she went on glibly:

"Old Amos was a very queer man. I have told you before about the two tin boxes he had, and how he wrote out some sort of statement in cipher, and buried it in one of the boxes. The statement of his ex-servant that he buried one of the boxes at a certain point, and planted a white rose there, caused us to dig there and find one box. It was empty—a trick of the cunning old man. Where is the other box?"

Lloyd shook his head.

"I don't know. Do you?"
 "No."
 "I wish we did."
 "I shall not feel safe until that box is found," Mrs. Parsons pursued, uneasily. "I don't know what Case wrote, but he had learned many things I would not like the world to know—things which ought not to be weighed against me—but the world is merciless!"

"True."
 "You would not be influenced, though, would you?"

"Sadie, my feelings toward you cannot change. We have gone through paths not the brightest, and not bordered with roses, but that makes the tie all the stronger."

"You are the noblest of men!" Mrs. Parsons declared.

"To return to our main subject: You claim to be the mother of Bertha, and propose to assert the rights which go with such a position. It is a bold claim, and, as I am to fight your battles, we must weigh the evidence."

"The adventuress looked uneasy."

"I trust your proof is good," Lloyd added.

"I convinced Professor Jones's wife, in her lifetime."

"Was the proof genuine?" Lloyd asked, quietly.

Mrs. Parsons moved restlessly.

"I told Mrs. Jones," she explained, "that my child and her sister's child had been exchanged in infancy; that Mrs. Howland's died, and she purchased mine to replace it; and that Bertha was that child. My proof satisfied Mrs. Jones."

"But was it true?"

"Why need I answer that?"

"Merely because, if I fight your battles," Lloyd persuasively replied, "I must know every item of evidence, and know the facts from the fictions."

"So be it, then; I'll be frank. I lied to Mrs. Jones. As far as I know Bertha was Mrs. Howland's daughter. Certainly, she was not my child, nor did I ever have a child!"

CHAPTER XVII.

WHICH TELLS OF MANY SURPRISES.

TEMPLE LLOYD quietly rose to his feet.

"I am glad to hear you make that statement, Mrs. Parsons," he remarked, coolly.

"Why?" she asked.

"Because it tears the veil of hypocrisy away from my association with you. You have confessed your infamy—now know me as I am; your most bitter enemy."

The adventuress turned pale, and hurriedly rose.

"Surely, you are jesting!" she exclaimed.

"I am not. When you began your infamous crusade against Professor Jones and Bertha, this last time, I saw that you were a dangerous woman who, because of sharpness of wits and superior knowledge of the world, was likely to prove more than a match for the simple-minded professor. As we had met some time ago, I knew of your plot before you visited him—I chanced to overhear you and Tom Bates talking. I determined to beat you with your own weapons. I pretended to be enamored of you, and won your confidence. I did it only to beat you out in your infamous game!"

The adventuress gazed at Lloyd blankly.

She did not need to ask if he was in earnest. His voice and manner told enough; they were full of coldness and severity, and expressed much of loathing.

"Oh! woman," he went on, "did you think I could desert Bertha for you? You were mad, mad! As for Bertha, I recently confessed to her just what I was doing, and, though Mr. Jones knew not of it, she has been fully in my confidence."

The adventuress drew a deep breath which was almost a sob.

"Now, the end has come," the merchant sternly added, "Amos Case's second tin box is in Jones's hands. Within it was the cipher you coveted. After long study I have deciphered the secret paper, and by it you are condemned. I know that, at the time you claim to have sold your bogus child to Mrs. Howland, you were in Europe. You had been there five years; you did not return until five years later!"

Still Mrs. Parsons said nothing.

"I leave you now," pursued Lloyd, "never to return. I hope I shall never see you again. In one sense I am ashamed of my association with you, but I was determined to frustrate your infamous plot. I have done so. Now, woman, if you cease to annoy the professor and Bertha

you will be allowed to go your way; but if you molest them in the least I will have you arrested at once!"

Sternly, pitilessly sounded the words of doom, and Mrs. Parsons knew that her last hope was gone.

She had been crushed, wretched, while he was pouring out the accusation, but her courage now returned with a rush, and, with it, fierce hatred for the man who had baffled and deceived her.

"You wretch!—you scoundrel!" she hissed, "do you think you can have your own way like this? Do you think you are an absolute monarch?"

"You can carry your case to court if you wish."

"To court! Fool! do you think that would satisfy me? A case in court is nothing to the pleasure of vengeance! You have played the Judas; now you shall meet the consequences. You shall die!"

The merchant bowed gravely.

"I presume you have a plan?"

"I have."

She rushed to the hall door and opened it. She supposed Tom Bates to be on the lower floor, and intended to call him; but Tom had been acting the listener during the last part of the conversation, and the opening of the door brought him face to face with her.

Her face gleamed with triumph.

"Tom, knock the head off of that scoundrel!" she cried, fiercely, and in the language of her class.

"I'll do more; I'll kill him!" growled Tom, his eyes blazing with hatred.

"Beware how you try it!" Lloyd retorted.

"You have dared play fast and loose with this woman, and you die for it!"

"Do him up!" urged the adventuress.

"I will."

"What is she to you—"

So began Lloyd, intending to dwell upon the fact that Mrs. Parsons had deceived Tom and showered her affections on himself, but the rough interrupted sharply:

"She's my wife!"

"Your wife?"

"Yes, sir! We was married last night!"

"Not much, you wa'n't, old hoss!"

It was a new voice, sharp and clear, just back of Tom Bates, and the rough turned quickly.

"The fiends! it's the kid!" he growled, huskily.

"You bet! Here I be, Spicy Jim, at your service, none the worse fer yer intention to do me up with gas. Here I be, Giant Grim, and dead on ter you."

Back of Spicy Jim was Mrs. Hunter, pale but composed.

"Better and better!" cried Mrs. Parsons; "all shall die together!"

"Right!" declared Tom, "and I'm the chap ter do it!"

"Hold yer hosses!" coolly interrupted Jim.

"You ain't dead on ter this game, old gent. You say this damsel is yer wife; I say she ain't. I seen you married myself. Do you know why yer lady-love insisted on bein' married in the dark? She played a trick on yer—"

"Silence the boy!" shrilly cried the adventuress.

"Hold up! I say, Thomas, do yer know who ye married?"

"Yes."

"You don't. Look on your bride now—she is here. Look!"

The colored cook appeared, with the landlady close behind her.

"That's your bride, Thomas—the negress!"

"It's a lie!" shouted Bates.

"It's true. Yarker Hair duped ye. Ask the landlady, or yer wife, the colored lady."

"The boy speaks truthfully," asserted the landlady. "You insisted on marrying Mrs. Parsons against her will. By our help you were tricked, and you married my colored cook!"

These statements had not been made without repeated and strenuous attempts on Mrs. Parsons's part to silence them. She saw her danger, and was almost maniacal in her efforts to prevent Bates from knowing the truth. Her efforts failed, however; he heard the others' charges, and the adventuress's own manner proclaimed her guilt.

Tom Bates's face grew ghastly.

The loss of the woman he loved, and the unfeeling trick played upon him, were bad enough, but the fact that he was married to a negress was too much for him to endure.

His brutal face became convulsed with fury.

"Traitor! fiend! devil!" he yelled, "you

shall not live to profit by your diabolical work. As you killed Amos Case, so will I kill you!"

He drew a knife and sprung toward her, but Spicy Jim leaped upon his back like a catamount.

"Perleece! perleece!" the boy cried.

He did not call in vain; into the room came blue-coated officers, billy in hand.

Long before, Spicy Jim had signaled across the yards to Joshua Green, and the latter had sent the policemen.

"Here they be!" shouted Jim. "Here's yer brindled mastiff an' yer painted lily o' the valley. Wade inter them an' nab two p'izon dangerous coves!"

Tom Bates shook off the umbrella-mender and essayed to cut his way through with the knife, but a few blows from the officers' clubs overpowered him before he could do any harm.

During the excitement, Mrs. Parsons, unseen by any one, put a small vial in her mouth, crushed it between her teeth and swallowed its liquid contents.

"Yowlin' wildcats!" commented Spicy Jim, "that's a right smart haul. Mr. Coppers, you skeercely ever, or never, spread the legal net an' got so many p'izon rabid sharks at one haul. Jes' so, by gum!"

"Sarah Parsons will never go before an earthly court. She died in prison, last night, having managed to swallow poison. Bates declared it was she who killed Amos Case, but she must answer the charge elsewhere."

Such was the announcement Temple Lloyd made at Professor Jones's house the day following the scenes last described, and such the end of the adventuress. With her death the whole plot collapsed. Tom Bates considered his fate even worse. It was not hard to find evidence against him, and he went to serve a five-years' sentence in prison. This was bad enough, but one thing was even worse to him—he never recovered from the shock of knowing that he had married a colored woman, and it haunted him continually.

Temple Lloyd and Bertha were married, and the once-buried gold of Amos Case made a welcome addition to their finances.

Professor Jones never found any pre-historic relics on his country place, but, in other localities, he followed his favorite calling, and was much esteemed among men of science.

Mrs. Hunter, otherwise the Woman in White, became a strong friend of those she had aided.

Spicy Jim was duly rewarded for his services by Lloyd, but he and Joshua Green hung grimly to the idea of pursuing their old work. This they did until Lloyd established a business where, among other things, umbrellas were manufactured. A few days ago a certain young man was promoted to the position of superintendent of the concern. The young man had once been called Spicy Jim.

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